LOGO AS A VISITING CARD OF A THEATRE. A CASE STUDY OF POLISH THEATRES

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Abstract:

Theatres are a sphere where wide cultural needs are met, where the audience can observe political fight between the society and the government, and where outstanding individuals realize their visions and ambitions (on the stage). Although the number of theatres in Poland does not decline, in recent years we have seen strong competition in a form of modern cinemas and "on demand" TV. Therefore theatres should analyze changing environment and verify their marketing strategy.

Today the most important hallmarks of a theatre should undoubtedly include a repertoire and great actors, but also a name and logo as determinants distinguishing a particular theatre amongst the others. This paper shows an analysis of Polish theatres identifying marks from a structural point of view (a sample embraces 60 public and private theatres, i.e. 43% of the total population).

Keywords: *branding*; *communication of value*; *competition in non-profit sphere*; *culture*

EL LOGO COMO TARJETA DE VISITA DE UN TEATRO. UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE LOS TEATROS POLACOS

Resumen:

Los teatros son una esfera donde se satisfacen amplias necesidades culturales, donde la audiencia puede observar la lucha política entre la sociedad y el gobierno, y donde individuos prominentes hacen realidad sus visiones y ambiciones (sobre el escenario). Aunque el número de teatros en Polonia no ha disminuido, en los últimos años se ha visto una fuerte competencia en forma de modernos cines y TV "a la carta". Por ello los teatros deben analizar el entorno cambiante y verificar su estrategia de marketing.

Hoy los más importantes sellos de calidad de un teatro deben sin duda incluir un repertorio y grandes actores, pero también un nombre y un logo como determinantes que distinguen un teatro en particular de los otros. Este artículo muestra un análisis de los teatros polacos identificando marcas desde un punto de vista estructural (la muestra abarca 60 teatros públicos y privados, esto es, un 43% del total poblacional).

Palabras clave: *branding*; *comunicación de valor*; *competición en la esfera no lucrativa*; *cultura*

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1. Introduction

The idea of marketing gave birth to a variety of issues which are vitally important today, including, to name a few, an entity's image and identity, its philosophy and behavioural patterns, system of values, mission etc. There is still no compromise on what elements comprise organization identity mix (company identity tools), though it is partially agreed that an image is mainly created by anything that can be noticed by the naked eye (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006).

This initial approach had undergone a few transformations until it developed into a contemporary concept which emphasizes the role of an entity's nature and character rather than its visual elements. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the name, logo, richness of colours used, slogans, different forms of advertising, and Internet sites can be distinguishing marks which create the image (van den Bosch et al. 2006). The issue is associated with corporate identity functions, which: i) provide the organization with visibility and capacity to be recognized; ii) are a source of information for stakeholders about the image and reputation; and iii) reflect employees' identification with the organization as a whole and/or the specific departments they work for.

In case of non-commercial organization, the issue on how to build a good brand/image is more pressing than in case of companies which can use their diversified offer, intermediaries' support, or advertising campaigns. Such possibilities are usually out of the scope of nonprofits potential, because they do not have ability and resources for such activities, although they have to reach much more complex milieu: local authorities, potential donators, grant-making organizations, beneficiaries and the society as such.

On this basis, the main aim of this paper is to examine what organizations make up their logos from, and what values they communicate to their external environment. The empirical part consists in a comparative analysis of brands of Polish public and private theatres, considering a sample of 60 theatres, which represents 43% of all theatres in Poland at the moment. However, it must be mentioned that 22 (i.e. almost 37%) of studied brands were built using words or letters only, that is, without including any graphical elements, and therefore the analysis encompassed 38 examples (27% of all Polish theatres).

The subject of the analysis undertaken, the logo structure, mainly concerns the examination of colours and shapes used, which can represent universal, cultural or conventional symbols. So, universal symbols include all signs which are perceived in the same way all around the globe (e.g. a bird represents freedom). Cultural symbols are those understood only in a given culture, which include letters, words or symbols connected with the tradition prevalent in a given area (colours, religious symbols, etc.). The last group of conventional symbols comprises abstract shapes that do not awaken any associations but have been promoted by given organizations.

2. The essence of logo

In the analysis of an organization or product brand symbols, the concept of a logo is defined as a graphical reflection of the trademark. Since the majority of brand symbols are a combination of words and graphics, the name of an organization quite often consists of verbal and graphic elements which constitute its logo. If a brand symbol is based on combinations of words and letters of peculiar shape, then it is called a *logotype* or *logo*. Since words and symbols awaken certain associations, logo patterns, colours or even the kind of font used influence the way the organization is perceived by its external environment. Surely, logo is a critical component of brand aesthetics and influences our senses and evaluations (Walsh e al. 2010), so –as it was mentioned– it is important in both commercial and non-profit activities.

All the aforementioned terms concern the commercial aspect of business. A question can be raised whether –based on the assumption that organizations operating in the same field are competitive with each other– non-profit organizations behave in the same way as other entities in the competitive market and they lay foundations of communication by creating their logo. One might want to ask: *why should a theatre possess a logo?* One of the most important reasons should include the fact that widely known and respected brands are a base of trust. This means that in case of non-profit activity, where a profit is not a foundation of existence, trust is a crucial element that drives stakeholders.

The positive results of well known brand possessing in non-profit activity can be observed in several areas, specifically (Kylander and Stone 2012): i) in fundraising activity and obtaining donators; ii) in

common efforts of managers believing in brand values; iii) in better efficiency (bigger scope of impact): iv) in stronger internal identity; and v) in improving competences of an organization.

Furthermore, a good brand of non-commercial entity can serve as a support of another, commercial brands which is just being introduced into the market. Thus wide known brands can be a kind of a catalyst of market acceptance. Certainly a good brand (with a well-known name and distinct logo) means better market authority, but to create such a brand an organization must rethink the core values it delivers as well as its visible symbols. Moreover, it's very important that a name and logo –through content and characters used in communication– should bring really positive values, which will be associated with a given activity.

3. Theatre as the market entity

On the market there are institutions involved in socio-cultural development as key pieces in the creation of the art and its dissemination. Theatres, appointed to carry cultural activities out, belong to the latter category. By the term *theatre* one can understand a special building, designed to show plays and drama, consisting of two basic elements: a stage and audience (STSP 2003). Theatre is also –alongside orchestra, opera or philharmonic– a form of market cultural activity. Such forms are established by central or local state agencies, whose duty is to organize cultural sphere on a given area.

Theatres may be set up also by individuals and nongovernmental organizations. In both cases, according to the Polish law, activity in theatre sphere is not a commercial activity and institutions that own theatres must subsidize them. While discussing public theatres, it's worth adding that the level of support does not fully cover the costs of activity and maintenance; therefore theatres (and other cultural organizations) have to run their own financial matters and cover all costs to earn money.

While reforming the system of institutions of the culture in Poland, it was assumed that resources from the state budget will decrease, while revenues from sponsors and donors will gradually grow, but this postulation is not fulfilled (out-of-budget funds, for example from tickets or rooms rental, bring about 30% resources). That is why today theatres have to face a really difficult challenge: staying on the market. According to the Polish Main Statistical Office (Polish Central Statistical Office 2012) , in 2010 there were 139 theatres in Poland; among which dramatic theatres prevailed (85), on the second stage there were puppet theatres (29) and next music theatres (25), as shown in Figure 1.

In theatre category some forms can be singled out, such as music theatres (opera, operetta), theatre of movement and dance, dramatic theatres, as well as ballet and alternative theatres. Today the majority of theatres are public and belong to the state, so they are managed by governmental agencies or local authorities.

Figure 1 main type of theatres in Poland in 2010
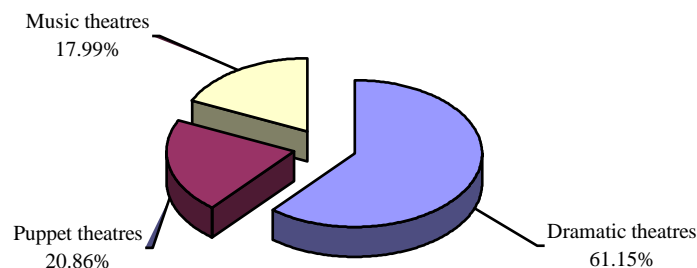
Source: Based on Polish Central Statistical Office (2012)

4. Logo analysis

As it was above mentioned, 60 brands of theatres were included into the analysis: 27 dramatic, 16 music and dance, 14 puppet theatres and 3 alternative ones. However, as 22 theatres have no graphical part/element, ultimately 38 brands were studied, including 11 dramatic theatres, 11 puppet theatres, 6 music theatres, 4 opera theatres, 3 dance theatres and 3 theatres in other categories (see Figure 2).

Looking at organizations' brands, human perception always notices colour and shape first. Colour is actually a reflected light that next is perceived by the sight, and from the physics point of view it is a dose of energy, but received in small portions. As every type of energy, colour can stimulate or soothe, inspire or discourage, always influencing the mood. The influence of theatre (art) can be discussed in the same way, so one may merge functions of theatre with the sense of colour.

In the analysis of chosen brands (logo), colours were present in two spaces: as an element of a logo and in the background. Therefore hues were divided into two groups. On the one hand, i.e. considering the colour as an element of a logo, white and black were the dominant options as 50% of logos were designed in such hues, far away from red, blue, green or other options (Figure 3).

On the other hand, i.e. when referring to those colours appearing in the background, black and white were also the dominant options (in some 40% of cases), but this time changing the first and second positions between them and again far away from other options which included brown, yellow, maroon or other colours. It was also noticed quite a significant percentage of logos with no colour in the background (Figure 4).

Figure 2 Structure of the analysed theatres
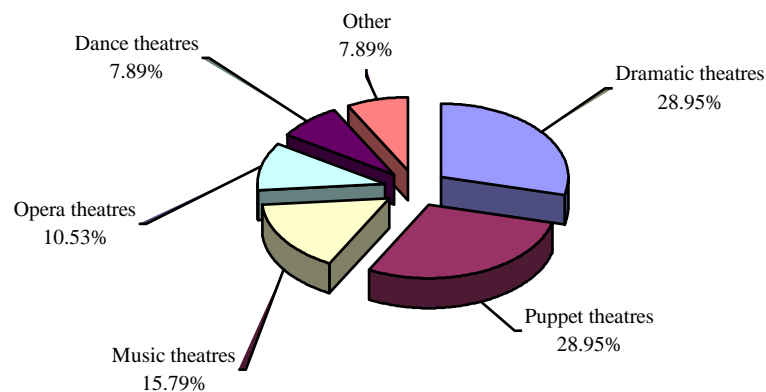
Figure 3 Colour as an element of a logo
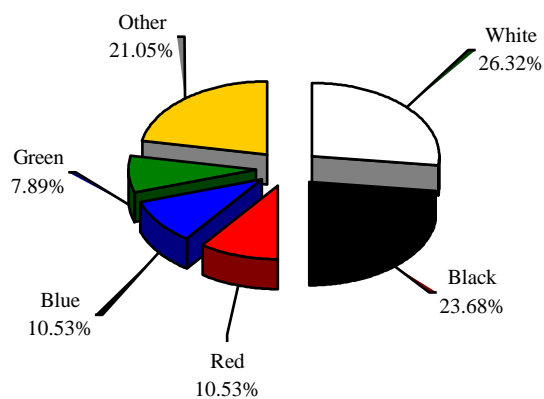
Figure 4 Colour in a background of logo
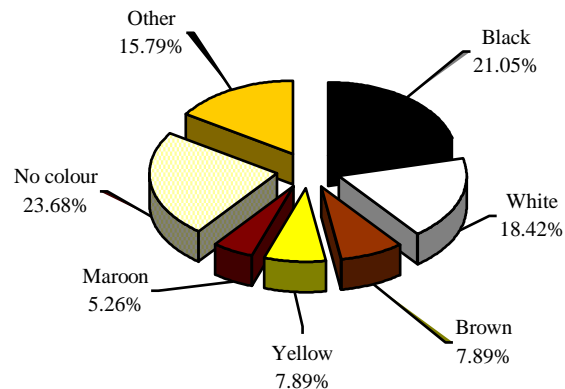
In the ancient times, white, black, red and yellow were typical dyes of Greek art, and so they formed the canon of aesthetics. In the middle ages, white, black, red and green prevailed, and –interestingly– black and purple were used interchangeably. Even then some importance was attributed to colours: according to pope Innocent III, green was a colour of hope, blue was a colour of heaven, red was a colour of love to the others, and white was a colour of peace and moderation (Rzepińska 1983).

It is worth mentioning that yellow was a colour of cowardice, treachery and deceit, but also a colour of warning and attracting attention. Black is instead a conservative colour, in most of Western countries is connected with grief and funerals, but –on the other hand– for young people is a colour of rebellion; besides, it is used for dyes or shapes separation and for highlighting contrasts. Today black is also a colour of elegance and sophistication (black tuxedo, for example).

The usage of white and black in analyzed logos can often be connected also with the need to demonstrate good and evil, which can be shown in a theatre (white angel and black devil; the good character wears white while the bad one wears black). Many associations and references can probably be found.

For a long time, colours were connected with a temper of a man and given concrete meanings. So (Rzepińska, 1983): white was synonym of a phlegmatic person (usually cheerful, reliable, objective in assessments, patient); black was associated to melancholic individuals (someone inclined to reflection, but also tend to be hesitant and nervous); red meant a sanguine character (sociable person, carefree, imposing and also dominant); and yellow was linked to choleric personalities (someone excitable, often dissatisfied, aggressive and stubborn).

In order not to limit a message to one kind of a temper, black and white should be mixed with other colours, red for example, which was quite often the case with the surveyed logos. In spite of this, dramatic theatres usually reduce colours to two dyes only: white and black, sometimes replacing black with grey or purple.

Looking for the roots of colours in today's logos, one has to state that we need to turn to ancient and Middle Ages, despite the fact that we live in the 21th century, just because colours as well as used shapes mostly refer to classic models. In our analysis (Figure 5), the main graphical form appearing (42.11% of cases) is a shape of human body, or a part of it (an eye or a foot for example) while a shape of a circle can be found in 15.79% of the analyzed logos (a shape of a triangle or square is even more rare).

Human silhouette refers to the receiver of an art; in other words, a man is a measure of all things –as a classic says–, everything happens for a man, and his well-being, a state of his soul, of his aesthetic sensitivity is an issue that a theatre is interested in, hence the symbolism used in logo. For this reason we will not find an influence of the geometric abstraction that, for example, was so popular in the beginning of current century, when circles, triangles and squares dominated everything. It seems to be too young, too fresh to use it in a theatre brand.

Figure 5 Figures appearing in theatre logos
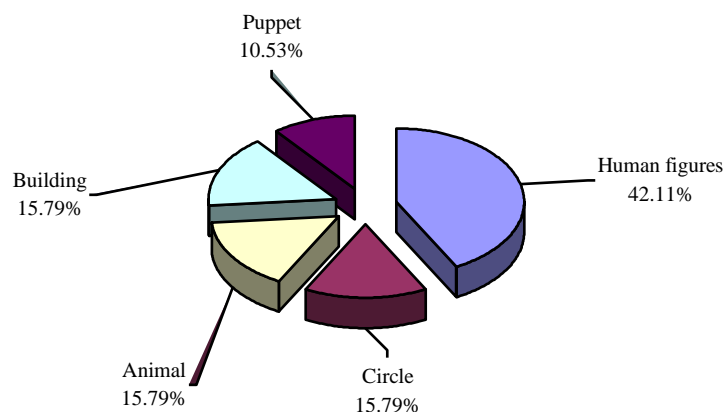
Except human figures some other symbols were used in theatre logos, such as animals or mythological figures with animal characteristics –a horse, Pegasus, a siren– (15.79%); buildings –a tower, a castle– or symbols that refer to a theatre as such –a stage, a curtain, a mask– (15.79%). In case of theatres offering performances for a younger audience, a symbol of a doll/puppet was also used (10.53%).

What we can say in all cases is that the theatre ought to be perceived as a place for spending a pleasant time. Such symbols as a castle or a tower can convey the idea of leisure, being metaphors of extraordinary places: an eye, as a symbol of watching and spying; a doll, as a sign of a joy for a child; a cock and kite, as marks of enjoyable time in nature; finally, a figure of a dancer as a symbol of fun. It should be also mentioned that some logos use a mask with a smile, which is a promise of a good fun. So, a logo of a theatre can show pleasure waiting for the visitors inside.

As stated before, many brands are also based on words or individual letters. They are often written in simple fonts, but sometimes refer to some trends in the art, like secession, which uses flexible lines reminding of plants. Such stylized logo refers to the time of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when artists were looking for new forms, separated from the classics. Logo in such a style means breaking down with the classic drama and turn toward lighter, more entertaining version of a theatre. This proves that a logo can help the art receivers to understand the essence, the spirit of an organization activity (Lange 2010).

Figure 6 shows concrete examples of Polish theatre logos including human figures and a doll, as well as another one which is based on words.

Figure 6 Examples of theatre logos including different figures and symbols: human, doll (puppet), words (logotype)

Source: Akademicki Teatr Remont (2012); Pleciuga (2012); Opera Kameralna (2012).

Analyzing universal, cultural or conventional symbols in logos, one can state that theatres using brands built on words/letters actually utilize cultural symbols, as such a logo will be understood only in a given society. Also colours are an example of cultural symbols, because black and white are not understood in the same way all around the world. Into a group of universal symbols, undoubtedly human figures can be classified; this group will also include symbols of animals, and symbols of nature (like the sun). It is really difficult to find conventional symbols, which were promoted by a theatre and now are well known. It can result from a fact that theatre, acting usually as a non-profit entity, does not decree adequate resources and cannot advertise itself like companies. Thus, it can be stated here that theatres usually use cultural and universal symbols in their logos.

At present, theatres should watch carefully what kind of symbols they use, since too often they utilize words/letters only, while today's culture is a culture of a picture (Mayfield and Mayfield 2012). This means that the time for changes has come.

5. Conclusions

The most significant elements which constitute the identity of a theatre include its name and logo (and its repertoire, of course). In practice they are key vital tools –sometimes even the most significant ones– of communication between an entity and its external environment. A good name and logo are crucial as they symbolize a promise and build the public trust. This becomes more and more important in a competitive market, and although the number of theatres may not change radically, today they must compete with alternatives as "on demand" TV, modern cinemas and other ways of spending free time. Therefore, theatre managers ought to redefine what they offer and use correct names and logos, which should answer today's audience expectations.

The logos of 38 Polish theatres were under analysis. Findings show that:

- White and black are the most often used colours, which may be connected with an idea of showing the good and the bad sides of life. Quite often black and white are mixed with other colours, but it does not happen in case of dramatic theatres.

- The most popular shape is a human figure or a part of it, but also symbols of some animals or buildings are used.

- Theatres too often use in their logos words/letters only.

Summing up, Polish theatres usually create their logos based on cultural (language) and universal (human figure) symbols. A third group of them, using conventional symbols, is not so relevant.

In the paper it was mentioned that nowadays theatres have to behave like companies in terms of communication and offer design. Unfortunately, some managers think that the mission of a theatre and its role in a society are so big that the idea will sell itself. They forget that modern culture recipients have wide access to information and know how to find the best proposal. This means that theatres must improve the level of their offer as well as their ways and channels of communication. It should be mentioned that such approach (assuming that theatres will defend themselves without effort) is also known as a "Titanic effect", i.e. managers ignoring the environment and leading organizations into difficult situations (Zaltman 2003).

There are also some managers who believe that marketing is unworthy for the purposes of the high art and they will not use it (Laberschek 2012). However, they should also notice that marketing prompting how to communicate with the milieu effectively and how to attract new audience is a method of better functioning on the market.

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