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Effective marketing activities to build a strong city brand require the development of an approach to exploring the city's image. This is one of the key reasons why the image is a frequent research topic in territory marketing and place branding.

This thesis aimed to develop a research plan that uses hybrid methods in identifying a city's image**.** A literature review indicated that in existing research projects in the area of branding and territorial marketing, combining research methods was most often based on sequential plans QUAL→QUAN.

Image is a qualitative research category because it is subjective and changeable over time. It is influenced by both internal sources (experience) and external sources (image campaigns) and less formal messages conveyed by the media and others). Therefore, an in-depth interview scenario was designed by placing questions that allow for the use of quantitative data reduction techniques. The points of integration of research methods and techniques were thus determined differently. The implementation of the research made it possible to indicate the potential of the research plan designed in this way and to determine the type of information obtained through the use of quantitative reduction techniques in small samples (small N).

The subject of the study in this dissertation was Polish university cities. Thus, the university or academic nature of the city was treated as one of the assets that can be used to build competitive advantage and brand positioning. This choice was based on the strategic potential of universities in building a knowledge-based economy.

The analyses focused on two aspects. On the one hand, the perceptions of the distinguished groups of recipients (stakeholders) of selected Polish university cities were presented. On the other hand, attention was given to the development of a research plan for image measurement, which would allow achieving methodological synergy using the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods. Thus, the dissertation fills a methodological and cognitive gap.

The research process was determined by the methodical nature of the main goal of the study. The chapters included the analysis necessary to conceptualise and operationalise key concepts. Chapter 1 was devoted to the marketing description of the image. It presented the various aspects of the image and how marketing concepts and tools are used to manage it. Chapter 2 presented the image as a research category and the approaches used in image research. Chapter 3 provides a description of the characteristics of hybrid methods and an analysis of the research plans using them in marketing and place branding. The result of the literature analyses carried out within the first three chapters was the development of a research design, a description of which is provided in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the obtained results of the empirical research.

The dissertation, by developing and testing a hybrid image research plan based on quantitative reduction techniques applied to qualitative research data, contributes to the methodology of the discipline of management and quality sciences. The presented analysis of the image of Polish university cities provides a comprehensive description of the image opportunities and challenges for the surveyed cities.