PROJECT
Cities of meanings: images of Polish cities and social reception of their advertising versus transformation of tradition and cultural content.

OVERVIEW
When Polish cities gained independence in 1989 the process of re-creating genius loci started. With gradual understanding of capitalism Polish cities introduced a variety of activities in the field of city marketing. The project explores how building the city image affects the (re)interpretation of history, culture and heritage of the city.

METHODOLOGY
Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods (IDI, n=48; content analysis: marketing narratives of 5 cities; CAWI, n=312)

KEYWORDS
city marketing, heritage, identity, stereotypes, simulacrum

NEW HISTORY: Wrocław
In 1945 a completely German Breslau turned into completely Polish Wrocław. Presence of Polish immigrants affected in a marketing narrative stating the multiculturalism - a serious understatement as the city itself is not only monocultural but also strongly underlines being Polish. The denial of German history leads to pretending it never happened. Wrocław builds new mythologies by exploiting the protests against the soviet rule, infantilizing its symbolic and abusing it as a marketing tool. The effectiveness of distorted history narrative is astonishing. Study shows Wrocław is considered to be the most prestigious, popular, modern, fashionable, recommended to foreigners. Young people would love to move mostly to Wrocław, possibly to Gdańsk or Poznań but would never ever want to live in Katowice and Lublin.

NEW INTERPRETATION: Gdańsk and Poznań
Gdańsk, perceived as prestigious, recommended to foreigners, traditional yet fashionable. Historically, it was the Free City of Gdańsk, part of Hanze, place where World War II started and Solidarność ’80 broke out. The story is tough here, but it always was about freedom. Main city marketing narrative has a double meaning: it is a city of freedom, but it also wants to free itself from the heavy story. Freedom brands all the city enterprises. Here it gets dangerous: marketing the freedom?

Poznań is more cheerful: no war raids, no repressions and a successful freedom rising. The city flourished throughout the time, known mostly for the trade. Main city marketing narrative is a well-played stereotype of a self-aware citizen and middle-class’ best qualities: hard work, financial modesty and good organization. Since Poles love complaining, there is no story to sell here. Surprisingly, Poznań’s optimism is welcomed by the youngsters; it is popular destination in job search, perceived as modern, solid, and active.

GRASPING THE HISTORY: Lublin
Once a royal city Lublin is now perceived as traditional, calm, mysterious, and boring. According to the study it is one of the most undervalued cities, stuck in stigma of East, a poor and “worst kind of Poland” that stopped in development years ago. To fight the haters and face the past, Lublin proved to be stopped in history indeed, yet in the mythical one, medieval, inspirational! Key narrative embraces the stereotype: there may be no development here, but… not all the cities have to run. This is a safe haven, a city captured in a moment, aside of time, peaceful.

NEW CHAPTER: Katowice
Katowice, for two centuries an industrial core of Upper Silesia, is now stuck. What used to provide success is now an obsolete burden. After 20 years of transformation, Katowice has one of the best economies in Poland. Still, the city is perceived as dirty and mysterious. Challenge: cutting off the industrial heritage in creative way. The postindustrial shift is reflected in art and design, new functions for the industrial sites, and rebuilding local identities. Study shows it does not work until the person actually visits the city to challenge the stereotype.