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The Concept of “Icon Streets” on the Basis of Lisbon Downtown

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the article is to enrich the current discussion on “place icons” through a case study of the Lisbon street “Rua da Madalena” and its architecture illustrating the integrated design and marketing concept adopted by the whole city. The paper presents the interdisciplinary approach using significant contribution from the fields of tourism, business, history and memory of the past. The article argues that modern cities need the “icon streets” that are basing on the social innovation policy, branding concepts, architectural theory and practice. Moreover, the paper presents how an integrated design strategy is practically applied in Lisbon downtown, and how it can contribute to the successful promotion of the city. Throughout this research, there is used the direct reference into both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, in terms of renewing the old city street on the basis of the unique brand strategy, the historical perspective that should characterized the street and up-to-date marketing concepts. The case study of Lisbon downtown provides the example of such the integrated strategy that can be easily adopted by other cities to improve their images and increase both economic and social potential by attracting tourists and media interest.

Keywords: Architecture, city branding, identity, iconic building, marketing.

JEL classification: M10, M30, M31, M39.

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1.0 Introduction

The last two decades are characterized by the dynamic increase in the number of marketing strategies created for cities and regions. Current analyzes indicate that this is provoked by growing competition between places in the era of mass tourism (Baker & Cameron, 2008), the need for differentiation which would provide the competitive advantage relative to other centers (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) and the desire to increase both economic and social development of particular city or region (Allen, 2007). In the substantial number of existing strategies a place is perceived similarly to a product that thanks to the proper promotion and communication will generate a profit enabling proper investment and stable development. Heretofore, the specialists were paying special attention to the brands strategies of the whole countries (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), as well as individual regions and cities (Caldwell & Freire, 2004) particularly in the holistic approach, taking into account their forming specializations (Modliński, 2014). However, relatively less attention has been devoted to the individual components of such brands and their role in the integrated strategy. The authors in the field of place branding only occasionally mentions the strategies and models illustrating the branding concepts for the single streets as well as their role in the promotion and development of the cities what we perceive as the serious loss of the strategic opportunities. For this reason, the idea of the study was to construct such a marketing concept for the particular street outside the city center that would attract more tourists to the suburban part of the city and make the local streets more recognizable. On the other hand, the paradigm used in the study is basing on the assumption that the creative strategy for particular street should reflect the traditional business profile of this place and its cultural heritage.

The paper presents the unique and important topic which was signaled several times in the previous papers of the other researchers. Aurora Garcia de Leon (2012) argues that the place branding strategies should not only take into account the modern challenges but also should be oriented on the local traditions. The importance of such a topic was signaled much earlier by John Leonardo (2001) and Tulio Hernandez (2003) who emphasized that the place development strategies should take into considerations the cultural identity and heritage. Secondly, we found that several authors stress the need for more complex and holistic place branding strategies (Govers & Go, 2009; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010). The analysis of the actual case studies from this area proved that more and more cities are basing on such concepts. One of the most inspirational place branding strategies in the European perspective were provided by Bıçakçı (2012) who presented the integrated strategy of Istanbul which started to develop more dynamically its identity on the basis of cultural heritage and tradition, and Rius-Ulldemolins (2014) who gave details about the new rebranding concept of Barcelona. Although the aforementioned strategies are mainly basing on the cultural profiles of the cities, we did not find any suggestions that would answer our core question: how to integrate the individual street into the holistic marketing strategy?

Such a lack of information became the starting point for the further investigations. Our research process was basing on three stages. First of all, we reviewed the actual literature concerning European cities and their strategies. However, we did not find any details about the place branding of the streets. For this reason, we started the content analysis of the WebPages of European and non-European cities in hopes of findings the example of such strategies. Unfortunately, also this stage did not provide any precise answer. For this reason, we decided to develop our own plan using the heuristic methods. Afterwards, we put our theoretical concept into practice in the Lisbon downtown for which we were preparing a new strategy.

The case study presented in this paper argues that cultural heritage and traditions of the cities can be successfully combined with new challenges facing by modern urban centers. The main contribution of the article is the idea that preparing the strategy for places, the marketers should not only focus on the center of the cities but also on the suburbs. The example of Lisbon downtown proves that building the unique profile and specialization of the streets helps to balances the tourist traffic and it can successfully reduce the internal competition between districts. To illustrate in details our work in Lisbon downtown in the subsequent parts of the manuscripts we are analyzing the whole districts from the

points of view of architecture, demography, history and business. Next, we develop, step by step, the new strategy for one particular street from Lisbon downtown- Rua da Madalena according to its traditional business profile. In the final part we provide the advices for other cities that can help to chose the best possible specialization for the streets and integrate them into the existing place branding strategies.

2.0 Defining “Icon streets”

According to Rajesh (2013) the satisfaction and loyalty of citizens and tourists are usually influenced by the image of the whole city as well as its districts, streets and monumental or iconic buildings. For this reason, modern cities are looking for new ways to promote themselves as icons not only locally but also in the global perspective. Some of them have started to build the expensive, original and challenging buildings to promote them as “icons” and to attract potential tourists. As the example can serve the global competition between cities to have world’s tallest building (Edwards, 2011) or even the list of most bizarre constructions and places whose became the regional symbols generating the profit from the tourists (Pedro, 2013). A lot of analogical cases suggest that city brand need not to be investigated only as a whole integrated concept. Also its single elements can become interesting area for analysis from the point of view of their role and impact on the effectiveness of the city’s strategy. For this reason, it is worth considering the street as the missing point in many strategies and present how it can gain the position of “local icon”. To that end, it is used the example of Lisbon downtown and some of their streets whose are currently transforming in such a way to cover the needs of both tourists, residents and local business.

Lisbon downtown was projected with a newest construction methodology and with the most modern infrastructures in end of the XVIII century, right after the big earthquake in 1755. The architects projected a new urban layout for all the area according to the particular specialization of each street – Augusta Street, Gold Street (offering gold) and Silver Street (offering silver), or Rua dos Sapateiros (shoemakers Street). Little by little, the area became the business center of Lisbon where the most important companies and banks were located. Nowadays, Lisbon Downtown is perceived as the tourist attraction, particularly because of its original architecture layout and unique urban design concept.

Lisbon Downtown has presently three main borders – Tejo River, Rua do Carmo (Carmo Street) and Rua da Madalena (Madalena Street). Whereas all the most recognizable global brands stores are spread across the whole district, Madalena Street has lost its social features and is inhabited mainly by people from various ethnic groups, serving only as a hinge between the downtown and the castle area. Accordingly, the residents of Lisbon and tourists have been rarely visited the street in recent years. The majority of main tourist attractions such as the Design Museum, the Augusta Street, the Praça do Comércio (Commerce Square), Rio Tejo (Tagus River), the Santa Justa Lift (Fig.1), and Rua do Carmo (which connects downtown and the Bairro Alto district, a very popular restaurants and bars area of the city) are located in the central downtown area.

Fig. 01: (top left) Arco da Rua Augusta, Rua Augusta (top center), Praça do Comércio (down left), Elevador de Santa Justa (top right).



Source: Luís Pinto, 2015.

While Rua do Carmo (Fig.2), became a tourist icon after a big fire in 1988 and its reconstruction according to the new project made by architect Alvaro Siza Vieira, Rua da Madalena, on the contrary, was more and more empty, with intensive automobile traffic, flowing downs the street. A lot of challenges but also the perfect location of the street was the main reasons to reclassify and stimulate it in such a way to transform it into a new icon of the city, taking into account its cultural heritage and local traditions.

Fig. 02: (right) Rua do Carmo, today, Source: www.lisbonlux.com, consulted on 10th June 2015, at 3 pm. (left) Rua do Carmo Fire.



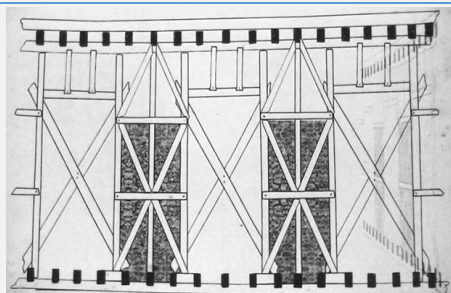
Source: www.casadotinoni.blogspot.com, consulted on 10th June 2015, at 3.15 pm.

3.0 Methodology: The case study of “Icon street”

The very first challenge in the preparation on the new strategy for Rua da Madalena was to understand its past and modern position. This seems to be necessary to balance traditions and cultural heritage with innovations and needs of the customers. The authors’ presumption was that the new identity of the street should base on both current images and memories which must be properly identified and analyzed.

For this reason, it was done the preliminary investigation about the relation between materials, morphologies, structure and macro profile of the street: people density, business, environmental issues, colors, layout, etc. Moreover, the detailed analysis of the old architectonic plans was done what helped to reuse and transform the existing space into the new modern flats. Interestingly, such “reconstruction” is possible and easy to carry out due to the very specific structure which is typical only for the Lisbon downtown called PST (Pombaline Structure Technique) that can simultaneously become one of the uniqueness of this place attracting potential tourists and specialists in the field of architecture (Fig.3).

Fig. 03: Pombaline Structure. Lisbon City Story Museum.



Source: Miguel Pinto, 2014.

From the historical perspective, the Pombaline Structure had an important input in the construction

methodology and in the engineering concept because of the experience accumulated by military technicians in construction of bunkers and fortifications based on the land situated near rivers. Secondly, the centuries of practice of shipbuilding in Portugal provided an indispensable knowledge to the art of carpentry with wooden elements that make up the Pombaline Structure system so unique. Even at the very first stage of the preliminary investigation became clear that such element can be used as the competitive advantage over other cities what should be included in the new strategy and promotion materials.

In the subsequent stage of the investigation several interviews with architects, marketers and authorities were made. As one of the interlocutor – Prof. José Augusto França said “there is an exigency to reinvent this area”. Such citation is worth mentioning because it illustrates perfectly the main idea repeated by all specialists – the district must be changed to attract attention but it must sustain its traditional shape. For this reason, it was found by all stakeholders that new image of Rua da Madalena must base on seven crucial elements: fruition, promotion, conservation, enhancement, regulation, tourism and development. According to such the assumptions the group of architects from Lisbon city hall started their detailed examination which will be, finally, used to set rules concerning construction and reconstruction methodologies, the types of brands and hotels that could be open in Baixa (Lisbon Downtown), car traffic, local products and many other subjects in a way to protect cultural heritage from this area of the city and make it attractive for the modern customers. As it was mentioned at the beginning, in the spotlight of the specialists was Rua da Madalena what was mainly provoked by its complicated economic and demographic situation.

2.01 The search for specialization

The first field study was conducted on the merchants and tourists to understand their vision of new Rua da Madalena. The results confirmed that the local culture and heritage should become the core of the new strategy. Therefore, the specialists using comparative analysis tried to elaborate the most traditional products that would fit to the historical profile of the street.

As practice shows the streets become icons mainly because of their trade profile or type of people activities who lived there. The Oxford Street in London is a shopper’s paradise both for those seeking affordable products in the fast fashion stores and for those seeking luxury brands in department stores. Soho area is the home to several world-class theaters, cafes, restaurants, pubs, bars and clubs, Piazza di Spagna in Rome is well known for the most luxury shops, which attract not only actual customers but also those who just want to enjoy the street climate. Although the aforementioned examples are presenting the traditional profile of these streets, too general specialization should be harmful for smaller objects which have to change their profile rapidly. Hence, the objective of the specialists became to find such the specialization for Rua da Madalena that would increase the status of the street, taking into consideration not only cultural and economical but also social and demographical conditions. However, to choose the most suitable specialization more extensive investigations were obligatory.

Basing on the secondary data, it was found that in the area live a large population of young businessmen and students who are renting apartments on Rua da Madalena because of the cheaper prices and suitable location. However, they have usually stayed there until they make their own family. Then, they leave the street and look for other locations outside the city where they can find schools and other infrastructures which do not exist here. Hence, the demographic profile of the street is created by young, well-educated people or students from different cultures and countries. To provide the full consistency of the street’s image the final specialization of Rua da Madalena should refer to aforementioned characteristic.

2.02 Urban form and architecture layout of Rua da Madalena

As was already established in the initial phase of the study, in order to find the most suitable specialization for the street, it was necessary to carry out a detailed analysis of the current urban form and architecture. The field work provided the complex characteristic in this area. The most typical elements for Rua da Madalena are the multi-family residential and commercial building (Fig 4) integrated in the Pombaline reconstruction plans, cage structure, with shops on the ground floor and three floors of housing and lofts, the stair case. The Main façade follows the architectural uniformity typical from the Pombaline layout.

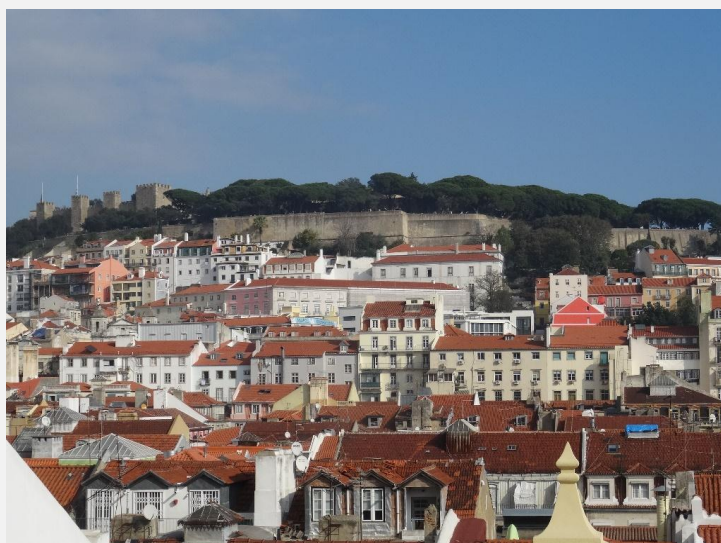
Fig. 04: Lisbon downtown, Rua da Madalena (Madalena Street) today.



Source: Miguel Pinto, 2014.

In each building are finding two flats per floor, with relatively small areas. The living rooms are facing the main façade and the services zone are usually in the rear of the buildings. The ground floor is composed of two stores and the entrance door. The different floors have similar flats plant layout, the left side with a larger area, and multiple interconnecting divisions, facing the Rua da Madalena (Madalena Street). Urban Placement flanked and integrated throughout the Baixa (Downtown) in the alluvial valley between the hills of the castle at the EST and São Francisco at WEST. In the North limit of Rua da Madalena finds a big square, named Martim Moniz (Fig.5). Around that place exists a huge community of Chinese and Indian people. At present, they have the shops and restaurants with ethnic brands and food.

Fig. 05: Castle hill at the EST.



Source: Miguel Pinto, 2010.

Strategically important is the fact that near Martin Moniz Square finds the biggest underground car

park in Lisbon. All people who will intent to go to Rua da Madalena could have the possibility to leave their car there. However, the results of the interviews with the merchants and residents suggest that it is still a need to arrange additional place for another car park inside the street area what would be perceived as a perfect convenience for all.

The analysis of the plans of Lisbon downtown shows that it was projected and organized as a regular and geometrical area. In the northern and southern parts, there are similar buildings which were designed following the analogical architectonic concept. To the east of the Travessa da Madalena (Madalena side street), there is one of the oldest part of downtown which was constructed before the earthquake in 1755. Within easy reach is the church of Santa Maria Madalena that was built by the King D. Afonso Henriques and Cerca Moura (Moorish Wall). In the past, in this area was located a Roman temple dedicated to Cibeles - the Mother goddess. The church of Santa Maria Madalena was rebuilt after a fire in 1363 but in 1600 was partially destroyed by a cyclone. After reconstruction, it became the status of national monument and, at present, it is frequently visited by the tourists.

2.03 The business profile of the street

As it was mentioned at the beginning, the business profiles of Rua da Madalena is under constant transformation whose purpose is to fit it into the comprehensive branding strategy of the whole Lisbon downtown. In recent times, the business profiles of the street was limited into small stores and local services. Although during the global economic crisis in 2007/2008 the substantial number of stores located in the Lisbon downtown were closed, at present, the district is developing dynamically. There are opening the different types of business, with better quality, traditional products what have already started to draw attention of the tourists. The main areas of activity are restaurants and coffee bars arranged according to local traditions. Moreover, there is a high concentration of gift shops, grocery and herbal stores without a clear profile, addressed especially to local consumers. For this reason, Rua da Madalena is main attraction for those group of tourists who prefer to become better acquainted with the traditional life of the Portuguese rather than global brands concentrated in the very center. This fact was the main reason for creating a new branding strategy adopted centrally for the whole downtown aimed to increase and balance the business potential of the area. The overriding idea is to restore this part of town its original shape by building traditional identification. According to the new strategy, each of the downtown's icon streets is constituting an indispensable component of the brand, offering to experience local traditions and introducing the tourists into philosophy and culture of the place. A key element of the strategy is to support local business, handcraft, regional restaurants serving traditional dishes and stores promoting Portuguese food and culture. According to the adopted strategy, Rua da Madalena becomes a place offering tourists, in the first place, the new experiences. The main product becomes the local culture which constitute the new-old profile of the downtown and its streets, each of which embraces different piece of the local tradition. Such an approach not only reduces the existing competition between the streets but it also increases the time which tourists spend visiting the downtown. Finally, it helps to involve them into the place philosophy, generate positive buzz and encourage them to return.

Although Rua da Madalena has sustained its origin character, it had to face several business and conceptual challenges. First of all, in the early phase of changes it must still compete with the surrounding streets having similar business profile but being located in the proximity of the center which is more frequently visited by tourists. Historically, the downtown has been divided into four main parts: government and financial district (the seat of government institutions and banks), tourist area (a predominance of shops with luxury goods and hotels), modern district (relatively cheaper, with plenty of global brands' stores for middle-class customers, restaurants and cafes) and peripheral area (with a predominance of small, local shops). Rua da Madalena being located in the peripheral area was forced to compete with the streets from both the tourist and modern districts for the attention of visitors and local inhabitants. The greater distance from the downtown's center and the lack of marketing vision represented a serious limitation of the effective development. Secondly, for the same reasons the

street was not perceived as an attractive destination for the local business which was flourishing mainly in other districts. In the first place, the local entrepreneurs were paying special attention to the presence of tourists and they were investing in the most crowded places even at the expense of higher rents. Therefore, it was one of the factor contributing to the depopulation of the peripheral area. Finally, the implemented marketing strategy requires not only an intensive promotion of the street’s new business profile among tourists, but also to convince the residents and local businesses to change their way of thinking about the place. For this purpose, the strategic actions are supported by the local law requiring from the tenants to engage only in specified activities, counseling for small businesses and tax reliefs. The belief and involvement of local business in the new brand philosophy of the street becomes crucial for the final success of the concept.

The new marketing concept of the Rua da Madalena is basing on two central ideas. Firstly, an essential objective is to combine the cultural heritage with traditional business constituting its uniqueness. From the strategic point of view, the restoration of the historic shape of the street and profiling its business based on local cultural traditions and gastronomy is a direct response to the needs of tourists visiting this part of the city. Supporting specialization and traditions being cultivated locally for centuries allows to generate an unique competitive advantage, impossible to fully duplicate in other places. The second objective is to promote Rua da Madalena as one of downtown’s “icon street”. Top-down business profiling each of the streets around downtown and treating them as the complementary sub-brands limit the current competition and attract new customers who were not aware of the nature of this place. Moreover, each component street gains an individual character that attracts a specific group of consumers. In view of such uniqueness the street has greater chance to become globally recognizable in its specialized field, create international community, attract the first class specialists to finally enhance its image and business potential.

2.04 The new profile of Rua da Madalena – “The Wine Street”

According to the research upon cultural heritage and traditions of Rua da Madalena and taking into consideration the demographic, socio-economic and architectural analysis it was decided that the new specialization of the street will base on wine.

Firstly, the wine is perceived by tourists as one of the most typical product from Portugal. Since XVIII century it was one of the leading country producing best quality wine that was exported to the customers around the world. The favorable climate was one of the reason which contributed to the spread of the vineyards into various location of the country. Each of them offers a large selection of tastes and aromas. The content analysis of the internet forum made by tourists indicates that preparing their trip to Lisbon downtown, they are looking intensively for the opportunity to drink traditional wine and it is even recommended to buy it as the souvenirs for friends and family. However, this district has not so far the well developed infrastructure which would offer wine what was caused mainly by its gradual transformation into the global rather than local place and no transparent development plan. Hence, the strategic decision was to adopt Rua da Madalena into such a specialization what has to face, at present, several serious challenges. One of them is the necessity to close all restaurants and non-traditional brands from Rua da Madalena to establish the space dedicated for only one specialization which is wine. The fundamental principle will be to obligate the tenants to offer such products.

According to the new plans, in the end of the street, near such the strategic places as Praça do Comércio (Commerce Square) and Campo das Cebolas (Onion Square) the restaurants with heritage and traditional Portuguese food will be opened. It is due to the fact that in the 18th century Campo das Cebolas (Onion Square) was the place where mainly vegetables were sold and Praça do Comercio (Commerce Square) was the center for the merchants offering all kind of materials and food not only from Portugal but also from Africa, Brazil, India, etc. At that time, the businessman from all around the world were coming to this place to buy and import the product which were perceived as best quality ones. At present, such intercultural atmosphere should be maintained by tourists. In the new strategy,

the restaurant area and wine street should be integrated what would provide the full complex infrastructure offering traditional products and new cultural experiences.

Secondly, the wine specialization for Rua da Madalena was perceived as the best choice due to the demographic profile of the residents and the unique architectonic layout. As it was confirmed by the previous analysis, people living on Rua da Madalena are mainly young people who are still studying or have just graduated. They are statistically more often spending their time outside the homes. The street which offer the wine and food can be a perfect location for such activities. On the other hand, because of their presence the street would never be empty what could encourage also the other groups of people to visit this place. The Pombaline Structure which is typical for Lisbon downtown can be modified easily into the traditional locals from 18th century. Undoubtedly, it would contribute to the reconstruction of the original atmosphere and it would draw attention of the tourists interested in Portuguese traditions and heritage.

Thirdly, the wine specialization is functional – it can offer relatively wide possibilities for various activities and products which can be offer on Rua da Madalena. Apart from the bottles of wine which can serve as souvenirs, the shops located on the street can offer traditional glass tableware and handcraft used to store wine at home. Simultaneously, the wine bars and restaurant with sommeliers can become the attractive place for both locals and tourist. Finally, the wine museum and thematic exhibition can serve as such the places which will bear witness of the professionalism and iconic position of the street.

4.0 Conclusions and implications

The case study of the new strategy adopted for Rua da Madalena and Lisbon downtown presents the original idea which focuses not only on the general plan for the whole city and district but it considers the streets as the integral parts of the place which is crucial to gain the clear and attractive image. In other words, the city or district basing on this concept cannot achieve strategic branding goals without the sub-strategies for each individual street. Only as a whole, they can create the uniqueness which can contribute to the socio-economical development.

The concept of “icon street” which was illustrated by Rua da Madalena assumes several principles which can be implicated by other cities in their own place branding strategies:

- 1) The demographic, socio-economic, architectural and cultural research should be the first stage of the project which would provide the identity of the place and strategic directions for the future actions.
- 2) It is crucial to identify the main stakeholders, analyze their needs and compare them with the identity of the place (constructed on the basis of research mentioned in the first subparagraph) to find the common points.
- 3) To each street should be adopted the individual specialization what will reduce the competitiveness between the streets from the same area and the intensity of tourists accumulated in the main center.
- 4) The new specialization of the street should combine its traditions and original profile with the needs of modern customers.
- 5) The project should include its current state to make only the minor changes instead of the complete rebuilding.
- 6) The specialization should be functional so as not to discourage the tourists and kill the creativity of potential business.

Although the concept turned out to be suitable for Lisbon downtown, it does not mean that each district around the world can use it in its rebranding strategy. Firstly, the relatively big metropolis can face the challenge to prepare the sub-strategies for each street, especially if they are partially damaged or neglected. In such centers, it is relatively more difficult to encourage the potential tourists to visit

the suburban streets even if they represent the interesting heritage of the place. Secondly, the concept of “icon streets” should be adopted by the districts or cities which rather want to regain its position than those whose objective is to create the position since the beginning. Thirdly, the objective of the strategy is not only to attract new visitors but also to spread the actual tourist traffic across the district. Therefore, the concept can be less effective for these places which have relatively low tourist traffic. Finally, the success of the “icon streets” is dependent on many situational and individual variables such as the form of promotion, type of dialog between authorities and stakeholders, current regional development and traditions of individual place what cannot be fully implicated by all cities and districts. For this reason, there is a constant need to adapt the concept into the local conditions.

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