Article

Awareness of the Cittaslow Brand among Polish Urban Dwellers and Its Impact on the Sustainable Development of Cities

Agnieszka Stanowicka *, Małgorzata Kobylińska [ID] and Anna Wichowska [ID]

Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, ul. M. Oczapowskiego 2, 10-719 Olsztyn, Poland
* Correspondence: agnieszka.stanowicka@uwm.edu.pl

Abstract: New ways of promoting sustainable urban development are currently being sought. One of them is the slow city model, which has been implemented by some municipalities. This model forms the basis for cooperation between the cities within the international Cittaslow network. It has been assumed that the Cittaslow brand could generate numerous benefits for cities. It can be a significant regional growth and socio-economic development factor. However, city dwellers have to be familiar with the brand, and they have to understand the philosophy behind the Cittaslow movement. The aim of the present study is to assess the awareness of the Cittaslow brand among the residents of the cities that are members of the Cittaslow network. Data from the questionnaires have been classified into multiway tables. The chi-square test is used to examine the relationship between the attributes. The surveys conducted demonstrate that the residents are not sufficiently familiar with the Cittaslow brand to derive any potential benefits from their network membership. This observation suggests that city dwellers should be educated on the main tenets of the slow city concept. The present study demonstrates that urban residents' awareness of the Cittaslow brand, the slow city philosophy and the Cittaslow logo is influenced by their gender and age. These results show not only the need for education but also the need to promote the desirable forms of urban development; the respondents were familiar with some activities pertaining to the slow city concept, but they were not familiar with the other activities and did not link them to the Cittaslow movement. The most desirable ways of promoting the territorial Cittaslow brand were also identified. There is a general scarcity of research on the Cittaslow brand in Poland and in the world, and thus further studies are needed to formulate meaningful conclusions with the aim of promoting the development of the Cittaslow network.

Keywords: slow city; sustainable urban development; city brand; Cittaslow

1. Introduction

Today, municipal authorities and businesses pursue various activities to maximize the competitive advantage of their cities while considering their sustainable development [1]. To achieve this objective, they seek various opportunities [2–5]. The cooperation of cities is one such opportunity that has appeared in recent decades. Membership in the Cittaslow international network is an example of cooperation between small towns.

Familiarity with the Cittaslow brand was analyzed in 2020/2021. The aim of the present study is to evaluate the familiarity with the Cittaslow brand among the residents of the cities that are Cittaslow members. It is assumed that brand familiarity determines a city's sustainable development based on the slow city model. Brand familiarity enables communication with a wide group of recipients, reduces costs (e.g., promotion, market research), and attracts new entities to the city—investors, tourists, new residents, etc. Moreover, we know that human resources are microeconomic determinants of productivity, growth, and long-term sustainable development. Brand familiarity can contribute to a better understanding of the direction of the city's development, and it can support the local authorities and motivate the residents to promote the city's sustainable development. The

functions of a city with a slow city model do not imply a slowdown in the development of the city; on the contrary, it implies a development that constantly improves the quality of life of its residents, thus increasing the city's attractiveness and its competitiveness, thanks primarily to its endogenous resources [6]. However, according to the authors, it is important that the residents, being those affected by these activities and at the same time the basic resources of the city, understand the initiatives taken. Understanding the activities of the local authorities, supporting them, and participating in the promotion of the brand can contribute to the sustainable development of the city. These considerations have been insufficiently researched to date [7,8].

One of the many benefits of the cooperation within the Cittaslow network [9] is the right to use the shared Cittaslow brand. This does not mean that cities lose their individual brands. The Cittaslow movement stands against the assimilation of small towns through globalization and popular culture, instead emphasizing their individuality and uniqueness [10]. Cities' individual brands, usually based on their rich historic tradition, culture, and unique identity, are preserved. However, Cittaslow membership enables cities to showcase their individual brands and derive the related benefits. These benefits depend on a number of factors, including the involvement of the local authorities in implementing the activities that are compatible with the slow city concept; the ability to cooperate with the other network members; local organizations' commitment to the slow city philosophy; the availability of (internal and external) funding sources for investment in member-cities; the current stage of development of the Cittaslow network in Poland; and local residents' familiarity with the Cittaslow brand, which is directly linked to their awareness of the Cittaslow brand [11], which is particularly important in view of the research assumptions that have been adopted.

2. Literature Review

The concepts used in the analysis presented have to be defined because they are often confused or misused. This problem requires defining such concepts as the city identity, city image, city brand, and individual and territorial brands.

In the globalizing world, modern cities are increasingly "commodified" as "urban products", becoming less authentic and distinctive and more standardized, predictable, and centrally controlled [12]. That is why it is crucial to consciously shape a city's identity, which is defined by the characteristic features that are communicated to the public by the city's authorities. A city's identity is developed based on its characteristic attributes or, in other words, the distinguishing features of its identity [13]. A brand, on the other hand, is a name, a sign, a symbol, a utility model, or a combination of these, which makes it possible to identify specific products and differentiate them from the competition [14]. A brand is a tool to increase the appeal of specific locations [15]. The term "brand" is not a universal term; this fact undermines the clarity of the situation (for an overview of the definitions of brand equity used, see [16]). According to American Marketing Association [17], a brand is the "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers". There is an agreement that the concepts of place branding are rooted in marketing theories and corporate branding, with some necessary modifications. There are many definitions of a brand (or image), especially of brands of a tourist destination, in the literature [18–20]. According to the authors, an identity is a broader concept than a brand. A city's image is the market's reception of a city's identity, whereas a brand image is the way in which the market perceives the defined city brand. The brand image is a narrower concept than the city image because it concerns only the subjective perception of a city's name, symbol, or logo. What is significant about the city brand is that it is a resource that can be created entirely in line with the assumed goals. The city brand can also be changed, which is generally impossible in the case of an identity, and difficult and laborious in the case of an image. The distinction between these concepts is important in view of the formulated research objective. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between a city's territorial brand (the subject of the present study)

and its individual brand. The individual brand is developed for a separate product, in this case the urban mega-product. A territorial brand is a vehicle that conveys a city's attributes, represents typical values of the city, generates associations with the area as a whole, shows the differences between the city and other places, increases the trust in the local government, and makes the people loyal to the local products, symbols, etc. [21–23]. A territorial brand is developed for a group of products, such as a group of cities in a given territory. It promotes communication with a wider group of recipients, lowers the promotional costs (which are spread among a larger number of cities), decreases market research costs, facilitates reaching recipients to convince them about the benefits of the ideas being promoted by the city authorities, and provides the benefits of cooperation and collaboration.

Brand development is a process consisting of the following stages: creation, positioning, promotion, protection, branding, and, possibly, brand termination. The branding process is a symbolic representation of the information relating to the city, and its aim is to create a set of values that are unique to the city [24]. In the case of a city, this is a difficult undertaking due to the large target audience, diverse stakeholder needs, and the resulting need to conduct diversified communication with the individual stakeholders [25]. Most Polish cities—especially small towns and medium-sized cities—are at an early stage of building their individual brands. However, they can derive additional benefits using a shared brand: in this case, the Cittaslow brand. The Cittaslow International Network of Cities where living is Good was established on 15 October 1999, in Orvieto, Italy. The name Cittaslow is a combination of two words: the Italian citta—city—and slow. It is intended to clearly indicate the desired direction of the development of the member-cities in line with the slow life concept. Cittaslow is a non-profit organization whose objectives are to promote and spread the culture of good living through research, testing, and the application of solutions for the organization of the city. The values promoted by the association include identity, memory, environmental protection, justice and social inclusion, community, and active citizenship [26]. Cities join the Cittaslow network in an attempt to switch from the current model of urban development, which relies on extensive growth and external investors, to a model of intelligent development of the city's endogenous resources [27–32]. Endogenous development is an internal, bottom-up process, characterized by limited external integration and based on local potential. Cittaslow membership is open to small towns (with a population of up to 50,000) that want to develop in line with the slow city philosophy and successfully complete the certification process. Certification is a tool for identifying the endogenous material and social capital [33]. In Poland, the development of the Cittaslow network began in 2004 and continues today. The Polish Cittaslow network currently has 36 members, and it is the second largest national Cittaslow network in the world, after Italy [34,35].

The subject of cities belonging to the Cittaslow network and the various consequences resulting from this fact has been researched by many authors. The most popular studies in the Polish literature include the work conducted by Farelnik [36,37]. Among the many aspects of belonging to the Cittaslow network, the author pointed to the relationship with the sustainable development of cities. This relationship results primarily from the fact that before joining the network, each city underwent an assessment that automatically guided its local development policy. The areas subject to an assessment and then development are, in particular, energy and the environment; infrastructure; urban quality; tourism and craft activities; hospitality, awareness and education; and social integration and partnership. These areas are strictly inscribed in the concept of sustainable development. Some of the many positive effects of the city's membership in the Cittaslow network, which penetrates and shapes the abovementioned areas, include the following: building a positive image of the city, gaining prestige from belonging to the international network, and using the increasingly recognizable logo of the network (which can be used by member cities) [38].

The logo is a very important element of a brand, which in the case of a city, should be associated with the city's specific characteristics, history, adopted development strategy, and values. The most important components of the logo are its shape, color scheme, size,

and graphic design. The Cittaslow brand logo depicts an orange snail that represents a slower and calmer pace of life, which is a key value of the slow life concept. Cittaslow is a network of small towns that prioritizes its citizens' quality of life over the hustle and bustle of modern cities [39]. It should be noted that slow life does not imply slow development. Quite the contrary: the focus on improving the quality of "unhurried" life is meant to be a distinctive feature of a city's identity, which is intended to attract various types of market entities and stimulate the city's socioeconomic development. The slow city idea emphasizes environmental protection and thus is compatible with the assumptions of sustainable urban development. The brand logo may be used only by the cities belonging to the Cittaslow network: on their websites, welcome signs, promotional materials, and in city advertising [40]. A specific way of involving the residents in the idea of Cittaslow is the organization of meetings, events, and open-air events under the logo of the movement, during which the local producers are promoted, especially those working in food production. The towns cooperate with one another by organizing joint festivals and promotional activities. The most popular event organized by Cittaslow is the Town Festival. It takes place regularly in various cities around the world [41]. The Cittaslow logo, promoted at such events, conveys the message that the city cares about the environment, supports local food production, focuses on improving the residents' lives, etc. The Cittaslow brand is meant to project an image of a city where life is good and where people want to live, as well as a city that attracts tourists and investors. The distinguishing features of the Cittaslow brand are a high quality of life, innovation, and an environmentally friendly lifestyle, in the spirit of the slow life idea [27]. It is worth noting that the Cittaslow brand also improves the participation of the local community and shares best practices among its network members. Using Cittaslow's certification methodologies, it has been possible to create a new programming model of the local policies based on the local community's suggestions and opinions [42]. The residents and the local authorities should be educated on slow city values. They need to understand the idea of the slow city properly to practice slow city activities and strengthen the slow city brand [43]. Knowledge of the Cittaslow network should be spread in schools and universities [6], although all the recipients of the municipal product are important because their interactions ensure the effective long-term adaptation of the development of the slow city.

3. Materials and Methods

The subject of the research was the Cittaslow brand, and the aim of the study was to evaluate familiarity with the brand among the city's residents. A total of 369 respondents took part in the study. The respondents were both male and female, and they were divided into four age groups (under 30, 31–45, 46–69, and over 69). The demographic structure of the respondents is shown in Figure 1.

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

1. Knowledge of the Cittaslow brand is insufficient to derive potential benefits from the territorial brand;
2. The respondents' familiarity with the Cittaslow brand, the assumptions behind the slow city concept, and the Cittaslow logo is influenced by their gender and age;
3. There is a need to educate the city's residents on the assumptions of the slow city concept.

The above hypotheses result from the fact that the Cittaslow brand is at the stage of positioning in Poland. Although it has existed since 2004, in 2010 the Cittaslow brand had only 6 members. Many cities have joined the Cittaslow network recently—large numbers of cities joining the network were recorded between 2016 and 2019. Some cities at the time of the research were new members of the network, hence the assumption that the residents' knowledge of it would not be high. The hypotheses also result from conversations with the employees of the Cittaslow Office in Poland, who has confirmed them by regularly contacting the local authorities and residents of member cities. In the opinion of the authors, there is a need to educate the Cittaslow network cities' residents on the assumptions of

the slow city concept. Once they know them, understand them, identify with them, and promote them, they can contribute to the sustainable development of the city.
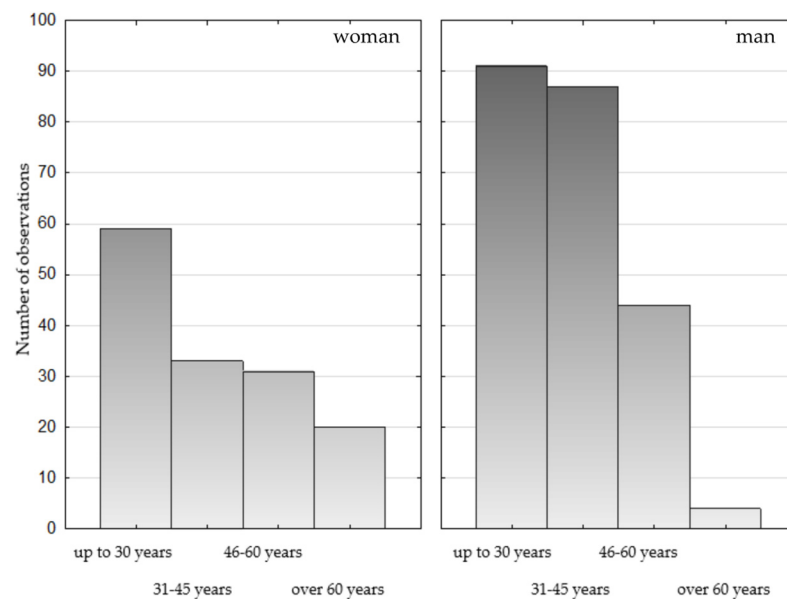
Figure 1. Structure of respondents by age and gender. Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

The survey questionnaire contained seven multiple-choice questions, and the respondents were able to give one or more answers (and provide additional comments in the "other" field).The questions were consulted with employees of the Cittaslow Office in Olsztyn, and they concerned the following: knowledge of the city's membership in the Cittaslow network; knowledge of the network's assumptions, familiarity, and symbolism (meaning); recognition of the network's logo; the effects of the city's functions in the networks; and the need to educate residents on the slow city concept. This research tool was constructed using a nominal scale. The study, conducted using direct surveys taken in 2020/2021, involved 321 randomly selected respondents from 34 cities belonging to the Cittaslow network in the year of the study. Most of the cities belonging to the Cittaslow network were located in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, in the north-eastern part of Poland. A detailed list and map of the cities belonging to the network can be found on the website of the Polish network of Cittaslow cities [44,45].

In the first step, non-quantifiable data from the questionnaires were classified and the dichotomous data and multiple responses were analyzed. Multi-way tables were helpful in the classification process by facilitating the presentation of the distribution of the observations based on several attributes and performing calculations to determine the strength of the relationship between the examined features [46].

The chi-square test of independence is most frequently used to examine the relationship between two attributes expressed on nominal scales. The purpose of this test is to verify the independence of the variables measured on nominal scales. The hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- Null hypothesis: attributes X and Y are independent.
- Alternative hypothesis: attributes X and Y are dependent.

In order to verify the hypothesis, calculations are performed with the use of the data collected in a multiway table.

The chi-square statistic is calculated using the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{r} \sum_{j=1}^{k} \frac{\left(n_{ij} - \hat{n}_{ij}\right)^2}{\hat{n}_{ij}}, \tag{1}$$

n_{ij}: observed frequencies in the ith row and the jth column,

$\hat{n}_{ij}$: expected frequencies in the *i*th row and the *j*th column.

If the null hypothesis is true, the above statistic has an asymptotic chi-square distribution with (r − 1) (k − 1) degrees of freedom. If, for the adopted significance level α, the *p*-value is less than or equal to α, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. If the opposite is true, there are no grounds to reject the hypothesis of independence of the examined attribute [47].

The independence test may also be applied to the three nominal attributes. The independence of the three attributes was verified using the same principles. In this case, the multidimensionality of the population size distributions and of the distribution tables was taken into account. In the study, the independence test was carried out for the three attributes, including the respondents' gender and age. The calculations were performed in the Statistica PL software [48].

The application of the chi-square test of independence was influenced by the publications of Howell [49], Bartok [50] and Stockemer [51].

4. Results

In the first step of the survey, an attempt was made to determine whether the respondents were aware of the fact that their respective cities belonged to the Cittaslow network (Figure 2, Table 1).
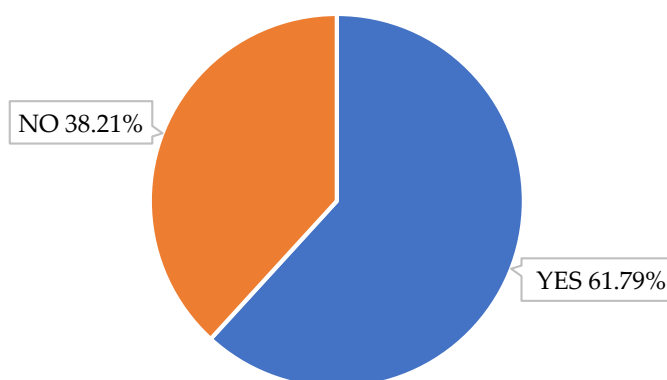
Figure 2. Residents' knowledge of the city's affiliation with the Cittaslow network (%). Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents who were aware of the fact that their cities were members of the Cittaslow network, grouped by age and gender (%).
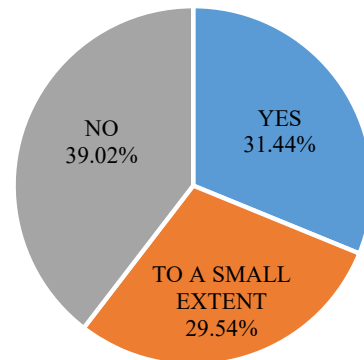
Answers	Women	Men	Up to 30 Years	31–45 Years	46–60 Years	Over 60 Years
Yes	62.39	60.84	58.67	65.00	64.00	58.33
No	37.61	39.16	41.33	35.00	36.00	41.67

Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

More than 60% of the respondents were aware of their city's membership in the Cittaslow network. However, this result should be regarded negatively because it seems that, by definition, all the residents of the Cittaslow cities should not only have knowledge of the city's affiliation to the network, but should also understand the slow city idea. After all, the residents are not only recipients of the "urban product" but are also the active co-creators of said product. If the respondents do not know about the city's membership in the Cittaslow network, it follows that they are passive and do not participate in promoting the slow lifestyle, and that they probably do not understand the actions taken by the city authorities. Therefore, the fact that one in three respondents was not aware that his/her city belonged to the Cittaslow network negatively affects the image of a slow city. The percentage of negative answers was similar among the male and female respondents.

With regards to age, knowledge of the city's membership in the Cittaslow network was somewhat higher in the 31–60 group. The young people (under 30) and senior citizens (over 60) were less familiar with this fact. According to the authors, education on urban development in line with the slow city concept should begin in primary and secondary schools, because it would increase the knowledge of the concept of the city's functions among all the adult residents, increasing the likelihood of achieving benefits from it.

The respondents' knowledge about the assumptions of the Cittaslow network was examined in the next stage (Figure 3, Table 2). The respondents were asked if they knew the main assumptions behind the functions of the Cittaslow network.

Figure 3. The respondents' familiarity with the operations of the Cittaslow network (%). Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

Table 2. The respondents' familiarity with the operations of the Cittaslow network, grouped by age and gender (%).

Answers	Women	Men	Up to 30 Years	31–45 Years	46–60 Years	Over 60 Years
yes	33.63	31.47	30.67	30.83	33.33	33.33
to a small extent	28.32	40.56	30.00	25.83	34.67	29.17
no	38.05	33.57	39.33	43.33	32.00	37.50

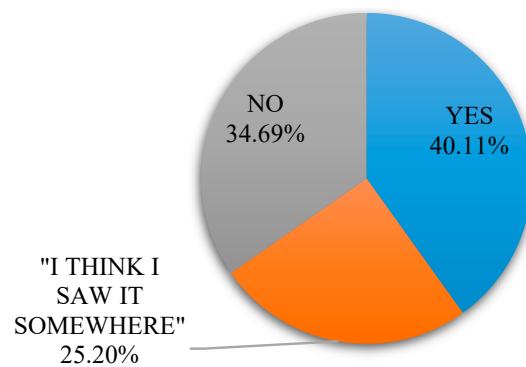Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

Nearly 40% of the residents surveyed were not familiar with the assumptions behind the slow city philosophy. This group included respondents who were unaware that their city was a member of the Cittaslow network. Only one in three respondents was familiar with the Cittaslow philosophy, while more than 29% of those surveyed claimed to have a limited knowledge.

This observation suggests that the urban community should be educated on the slow city development model. It is worth emphasizing that fewer men were completely unfamiliar with the slow city concept than women, whereas a much higher percentage of the male respondents (over 40%) declared low levels of knowledge. The lowest levels of knowledge were noted in the group of respondents aged 31–45, followed by the young people (30 and younger).

In the next part of the survey, the respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the Cittaslow logo (the lack of knowledge about the city's membership in the Cittaslow network does not imply that the respondents have never seen the characteristic Cittaslow logo) (Figure 4, Table 3).

Nearly 35% of the respondents were not familiar with the Cittaslow logo. Women were more familiar with the snail logo (almost 44%) than men. The Cittaslow logo was recognized by only around 30% of the male respondents. Young people (30 and younger) and the respondents aged 31–45 were the least familiar with the Cittaslow logo. Among the

older residents, 75% had encountered the Cittaslow logo (37.5% were familiar, and 37.5% were rather familiar).

Figure 4. Knowledge of the Cittaslow logo (%). Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

Table 3. Are you familiar with the Cittaslow orange snail logo? (%).

Answers	Women	Men	Up to 30 Years	31–45 Years	46–60 Years	Over 60 Years
yes	43.81	30.77	35.33	47.50	38.67	37.50
I think I saw it somewhere	21.68	35.66	24.67	15.00	38.67	37.50
no	34.51	21.68	40.67	37.50	22.67	25.00

Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

This observation also suggests that young people should be educated on the Cittaslow network, and that the promotion of the slow city philosophy should rely more heavily on the orange snail logo. The associations with the snail logo were analyzed in the next step (Table 4).

Table 4. What does the orange snail symbolize? (%).

Answers	In All	Women	Men	Up to 30 Years	31–45 Years	46–60 Years	Over 60 Years
slower development of the city	11.65	9.73	13.99	10.67	10.83	14.67	12.50
slower pace of city life	33.33	35.84	29.37	26.67	33.33	38.67	58.33
pro-ecological approach in city management	25.47	25.22	25.17	24.67	22.50	34.67	16.67
another perception	4.07	3.98	4.20	3.33	3.33	8.00	0.00

Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

Most of the respondents associated the snail logo with a slower pace of life in the city—one in three respondents gave this answer. This association was made more often by women than by men, and among the age groups, this association was made mostly by seniors. This association was less frequently encountered among younger subjects. One in four respondents associated the logo with environmentally friendly urban management, which should be interpreted positively because environmental protection is one of the main tenets of the slow city philosophy. This answer was most often given by the people aged 46–60, which suggests that this age group is most familiar with the new idea of city management. Unfortunately, more than 11% of the polled subjects associate the snail logo with the slower development of the city. This answer was more often given by men than women, and by people older than 46. Young people made this observation less often. This is not a correct association, which should indicate to city officials that the image of the Cittaslow logo must be improved. At present, the snail logo appears to be misinterpreted. The slow city philosophy should be based on a slower pace of life, but this interpretation should not be applied in the context of economic growth. On the contrary, a slower pace of life is meant to increase the quality of life by attracting residents from large

cities who are tired of the fast pace of life, and by preventing the depopulation of small towns. The increase in population should attract investors and promote the socioeconomic development of the city in the long term (in conjunction with environmental protection, which is a part of the sustainable development concept). The need to educate the local residents on the Cittaslow concept was assessed in the last stage of the study (Table 5).

Table 5. Perceived need for education on the Cittaslow movement and the slow city concept.

Answers	In All	Women	Men	Up to 30 Years	31–45 Years	46–60 Years	Over 60 Years
definitely yes	30.35	28.76	32.87	32.67	30.83	24.00	33.33
rather yes	40.65	19.03	30.07	36.67	46.67	38.67	41.67
rather not	17.89	11.06	25.17	16.67	15.83	26.67	8.33
no, this is a city government affair	11.11	3.54	11.19	14.00	6.67	10.67	16.67

Source: the authors, based on their survey research.

Not all the respondents recognized this need, but more than 70% of the participants believed that such education was needed to a greater or lesser extent. More than 40% of the respondents were uncertain, which can probably be attributed to their imperfect knowledge of the slow city idea. One in three respondents argued that education was necessary, and only 11% believed that education was not necessary. The respondents aged 46–60 were the most skeptical about the need to educate the residents—nearly 17% of these participants did not see the need to educate community members on the assumptions of their city's functions in the Cittaslow network. The need for educational measures was not recognized by 11% of the men, and by only 3.54% of the women.

In the next part of the study, the chi-square statistic was calculated for the respective groups of variables, and the corresponding *p*-values were determined in the classic chi-square test of independence for three variables (Table 6).

Table 6. Chi-square test of independence for three variables.

Variables	Chi-Square Test	
	χ^2	*p* Value
Z1, Z2, Z3	29.46	0.001
Z1, Z2, Z4	35.34	0.006
Z1, Z2, Z5	55.53	0.000
Z1, Z2, Z6	67.66	0.000

Z1—gender (1—woman, 0—mam), Z2—age (1—up to 30 years, 2—31–45 years, 3—46–60 years, 4—over 60 years), Z3—knowledge of the residents about the city's affiliation to the Cittaslow network (1—yes, 0—no), Z4—the respondents' familiarity with the operations of the Cittaslow network (1—yes, 2—w to a small extent, 3—no), Z5—knowledge of the Cittaslow logo (1—yes, 2—I think I saw it some-where, 3—no), Z6—assessment of the need for education about the principles of Cittaslow and the slow city concept (1—definitely yes, 2—rather yes, 3—rather not, 4—no, this is a city government affair). Source: the authors, based on the survey research.

For each group of variables, the *p*-value was significantly lower than the adopted significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. This result points to the high significance of the participants' knowledge of the city's membership in the Cittaslow network, familiarity with the Cittaslow philosophy and the Cittaslow logo, and the perceived need to educate residents on the Cittaslow network and the slow city concept, depending on the respondents' age and gender.

5. Discussion

The issue of brand awareness of the Cittaslow network, addressed in this study, is part of the problem of shaping the brand of urban centres. This is an issue that takes the form of not only a scientific problem, but, above all, a practical one, and it has been analyzed by many authors and institutions [52–55] which use for this purpose, as in this study, the

assessment of the awareness or perception of the city's brand. In this study, this issue was assessed from the point of view of a resident of one of the Cittaslow network cities. In some studies, the subjects of the research were tourists or people staying temporarily in these cities [56–58]. The approach used in this study, and the conclusions drawn from the abovementioned studies, may be important to improve brand recognition among the residents and engender a stronger affiliation and connection with their own city. This may also have consequences for the sustainable development of these cities.

The popularity of the abovementioned issue results from the fact that today many cities face the problem of competing for human, financial, and material resources. As mentioned in the literature review, this issue is particularly important for smaller urban centres. Therefore, in a well-managed city, there is a need to build an appropriate image of the city. One way to do that is to try to renew the city's existing brand through new activities and related efforts [59]. One way to achieve this goal, which can be used especially by small towns, is to bring cities into various networks, associations, or regional and international cooperation. One such example is the Cittaslow network. However, for belonging to such networks to bring the expected benefits, the appropriate conditions must be met, including the brand recognition of the cooperation network. In connection with the above, the research undertaken in this study may be an important starting point for further activities aimed at increasing the efficiency of the entire Cittaslow network through a more rigorous promotion of its own brand.

The first hypothesis postulating that knowledge of the Cittaslow brand is insufficient to derive potential benefits from the territorial brand was confirmed. This was due to the fact that a large percentage of the respondents were not aware that their respective cities belonged to the Cittaslow network. According to the authors, higher levels of awareness are needed for Cittaslow membership to generate any benefits. In addition, city residents were not familiar with the slow city model, and those who were familiar with it admitted that their knowledge of it was limited. A high percentage of the respondents were not familiar with the Cittaslow logo or the symbolic significance of the orange snail. In many cases, the associations with the Cittaslow logo were incorrect, because many participants associated the orange snail with a slower rate of urban development. Due to these inappropriate associations with the brand of the Cittaslow network, it may be impossible to obtain positive outcomes relating to a territorial brand as a carrier of the positive associations with the city, respected values of the city, or its specificity and maintaining the loyalty of its residents to the city [21–23]. As previously noted, these features can be of key importance in the case of small towns, especially in the context of their socio-economic development.

Due to low levels of familiarity with the Cittaslow brand and the main tenets of the slow city concept, there is a need to educate the residents on this subject in order to enable them to reap the benefits from implementing the territorial brand. Most residents recognized this need. This observation confirms the third hypothesis.

The chi-square statistic was calculated for three groups of variables in this study. The analysis of the results indicates that the respondents' knowledge of the Cittaslow brand, the main tenets of the slow city concept and the Cittaslow logo, and the perceived need to educate residents on the Cittaslow network and the slow city concept were significantly influenced by the participants' gender and age. This observation validates the second hypothesis. Young respondents and seniors were characterized by the lowest levels of knowledge about membership in the Cittaslow network. These age groups were also the most likely to support the education of the residents, and most of the respondents who gave this answer were male, most likely because men demonstrated lower levels of knowledge in this area.

Familiarity with the Cittaslow brand was also analyzed by other authors in 2019 [6]. The results of those studies were similar to the presented ones—the residents had no awareness of the inclusion of their cities in the cooperation network. Another study conducted in 2011 found that local residents' involvement and appreciation for the Cittaslow concept were very low. The authors suggested that local participation and support merit further

research [7]. It is optimistic that in other studies from 2020, over 80% of the Cittaslow city residents have already noticed the positive effects of membership in the Cittaslow network with regards to city development [9]. According to the authors, a higher level of awareness is needed for Cittaslow membership to generate benefits. A strong brand can then contribute to supporting the development of the local economy [4,10].

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to assess the awareness of the Cittaslow brand among the residents of the cities belonging to this network. The results indicate that conscious branding can support the sustainable development of the city, and that the residents, being the main beneficiaries of the adopted urban development policy, should be familiar with the measures implemented by the local authorities in order to support, promote, and even initiate them [5]. Urban development based on the slow city model is firmly rooted in the idea of preserving the environment for future generations, as well as searching for specific ways to improve the quality of life of its residents. The slow city model focuses on promoting life in a small town to increase the local population and stimulate the socioeconomic development of small towns. Promoting small towns through a shared Cittaslow brand can accelerate this process. Therefore, the residents should be familiar with the slow city philosophy, the main principles of cooperation in the Cittaslow network, and the benefits that result from the promotional activities under the Cittaslow brand [60,61]. Knowledge of the Cittaslow brand is insufficient for the residents to derive any potential benefits from the territorial brand. There is a need to educate the residents on the slow city movement, especially the young people and seniors. Their active and conscious attitude can facilitate the promotion of a small city by attracting investors, tourists, and new residents to it, which can, in turn, stimulate the socio-economic development of the city. From a scientific point of view, it seems important to further study the benefits of the cooperation between cities through networking and promoting each other using a common brand, and to indicate the desired changes in this area in light of the evolving conditions that characterize the functions of cities.

References

1. Wierzbicka, W. Socio-economic potential of cities belonging to the Polish National Cittaslow Network. *Oecon. Copernic.* **2020**, *11*, 203–224. [CrossRef]
2. Kudełko, J.; Żmija, K.; Żmija, D. Regional smart specialisations in the light of dynamic changes in the employment structure: The case of a region in Poland. *Equilib. Q. J. Econ. Econ. Policy* **2022**, *17*, 133–171. [CrossRef]
3. Roszko-Wójtowicz, E.; Grzelak, M.M. Multi-dimensional analysis of regional investment attractiveness in Poland. *Equilib. Q. J. Econ. Econ. Policy* **2021**, *16*, 103–138. [CrossRef]
4. Brodziński, Z.; Kurowska, K. Cittaslow idea as a new proposition to stimulate sustainable local development. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 5039. [CrossRef]
5. Wichowska, A. Economic aspects of shrinking cities in Poland in the context of regional sustainable development. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 3104. [CrossRef]

6.　Wierzbicka, W.; Farelnik, E.; Stanowicka, A. The development of the Polish National Cittaslow Network. *Olszt. Econ. J.* **2019**, *14*, 113–125. [CrossRef]

7.　Lewandowska, I.; Drzewicki, A.; Wendt, J. Awareness of the Cittaslow network among students in Olsztyn and Gdańsk cities. *Pol. J. Nat. Sci.* **2019**, *34*, 559–573.

8.　Bekar, A.; Yozukmaz, N.; Gövce, M.; Sürücü, C. The Concept of Cittaslow as a Marketing Tool for Destination Development: The Case of Mugla. *Turk. Am. Int. J. Soc. Sci.* **2015**, *4*, 54–64.

9.　Farelnik, E.; Stanowicka, A.; Wierzbicka, W. The effects of membership in the Polish National Cittaslow Network. *Equilib. Q. J. Econ. Econ. Policy* **2021**, *16*, 139–167. [CrossRef]

10.　Korkmaz, H.; Mercan, Ş.O.; Atay, L. The Role of Cittaslow in Destination Branding: The Case of Seferihisar. *Curr. Issues Tour. Res.* **2014**, *4*, 5–10.

11.　Farelnik, E.; Stanowicka, A.; Wierzbicka, W. International cooperation between cities based on the example of the Cittaslow network. *Olszt. Econ. J.* **2017**, *12*, 415–425. [CrossRef]

12.　Semmens, J.; Freeman, C. The Value of Cittaslow as an Approach to Local Sustainable Development: A New Zealand Perspective. *Int. Plan. Stud.* **2012**, *17*, 353–375. [CrossRef]

13.　Markowski, Ł. Local identity as a determining factor of Cittaslow city development based on the example of Lidzbark Warmiński. *Pr. Nauk. Uniw. Ekon. We Wrocławiu* **2019**, *63*, 79–91. [CrossRef]

14.　Stanowicka, A. Individual Brand of the City or the Brand of the City Networks-Problems of Its Building in Cities in Cittaslow Networks. *Biul. Kom. Przestrz. Zagospod. Kraj.* **2018**, *272*, 147–160.

15.　Górska, A.; Mazurek, G. The effect of the CEO media coverage on corporate brand equity: Evidence from Poland. *Oecon. Copernic.* **2021**, *12*, 499–523. [CrossRef]

16.　Skalický, R.; Meluzín, T.; Zinecker, M. Brand valuation: An innovative approach based on the risk difference. *Oecon. Copernic.* **2021**, *12*, 159–191. [CrossRef]

17.　American Marketing Association. Available online: https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/ (accessed on 16 May 2022).

18.　Păunescu, C.; Moraru, R. Maximizing Social Value in The Hotel Online Environment Using An Analytic Hierarchy Process. *J. Compet.* **2018**, *10*, 106–124. [CrossRef]

19.　Flisikowski, K.; Kucharska, W. The condition of economies. Do most valuable global brands matter? *Equilib. Q. J. Econ. Econ. Policy* **2018**, *13*, 251–264. [CrossRef]

20.　Anand, I.M.; Gaur, S.S. Consequences of consumers' emotional responses to government's green initiatives: Insights from a scenario-based experimental study. *Manag. Environ. Qual. Int. J.* **2019**, *30*, 243–259. [CrossRef]

21.　Ponikowska, K. Cittaslow ideas as elements of building a territorial brand. A case study of Kalety. *Zarządzanie Publiczne* **2019**, *2*, 119–129. [CrossRef]

22.　Dudek-Mańkowska, S. Identity of Place in the Branding of Small and Medium-Sized Communes. *Olszt. Econ. J.* **2019**, *14*, 87–100. [CrossRef]

23.　Kiryluk, H.; Glińska, E.; Barkun, Y. Benefits and barriers to cooperation in the process of building a place's brand: Perspective of tourist region stakeholders in Poland. *Oecon. Copernic.* **2020**, *11*, 289–307. [CrossRef]

24.　Lucarelli, A.; Berg, P. City Branding: A State-of-the-art Review of the Research Domain. *J. Place Manag. Dev.* **2011**, *4*, 9–27. [CrossRef]

25.　Fan, Y. Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded? *J. Vacat. Mark.* **2006**, *12*, 5–14. [CrossRef]

26.　Cittaslow International. Available online: https://www.cittaslow.org/sites/default/files/content/page/files/257/charter_cittaslow_en_05_18.pdf (accessed on 15 May 2021).

27.　Zadęcka, E. Slow City as a Local Development Model. *Econ. Reg. Stud.* **2018**, *11*, 84–106. [CrossRef]

28.　Kuźniar, W.; Cyran, K. Selected Aspects of the Residential Property Market in the Context of Creating a City Image (an Example from Rzeszów). *Olszt. Econ. J.* **2020**, *15*, 39–52. [CrossRef]

29.　Jakimowicz, A.; Rzeczkowski, D. New measure of economic development based on the four-colour theorem. *Entropy* **2020**, *23*, 61. [CrossRef]

30.　Batyk, I.M.; Farelnik, E.; Rakowska, J.; Maciejczak, M. Polish Cittaslow Local Governments' Support for Renewable Energy Deployment vs. Slow City Concept. *Energies* **2021**, *15*, 201. [CrossRef]

31.　Drobniak, A. Resilience and hybridization of development of small and medium towns in Poland. *Olszt. Econ. J.* **2019**, *14*, 47–62. [CrossRef]

32.　Batyk, I.; Woźniak, M. Benefits of belonging to the Cittaslow network in the opinion of residents of member cities. *Econ. Reg. Stud.* **2019**, *12*, 56–67. [CrossRef]

33.　Zawadzka, A. Potencjalne implikacje społeczno-ekonomiczne akcesji do sieci Cittaslow w erze przyspieszenia. *Biul. Kom. Przestrz. Zagospod. Kraj.* **2017**, *266*, 125–141.

34.　Cittaslow-Miasta Cittaslow. Available online: https://cittaslowpolska.pl/index.php/pl/miasta-cittaslow?start=30 (accessed on 29 April 2023).

35.　Wierzbicka, W. Activities Undertaken in the Member Cities of the Polish National Cittaslow Network in the Area of "Energy and Environmental Policy". *Energies* **2022**, *15*, 1309. [CrossRef]

36.　Farelnik, E. Determinants of the development of slow cities in Poland. *Pr. Nauk. Uniw. Ekon. We Wrocławiu* **2020**, *64*, 18–36. [CrossRef]

37. Farelnik, E. Cooperation of slow cities as an opportunity for the development: An example of Polish National Cittaslow Network. *Oecon. Copernic.* **2020**, *11*, 267–287. [CrossRef]
38. Farelnik, E. Znaczenie koncepcji" slow city" w budowaniu zrównoważonego rozwoju małych miast w Polsce. *Stud. BAS* **2022**, *3*, 99–120. [CrossRef]
39. Stanowicka, A. The city marketing mix: The example of Polish cities associated in the Cittàslow network. *Stud. Reg. I Lokal.* **2018**, *4*, 111–125. [CrossRef]
40. Zagroba, M.; Pawlewicz, K.; Senetra, A. Analysis and Evaluation of the Spatial Structure of Cittaslow Towns on the Ex-ample of Selected Regions in Central Italy and North-Eastern Poland. *Land* **2021**, *10*, 780. [CrossRef]
41. Presenza, A.; Abbate, T.; Micera, R. The Cittaslow Movement: Opportunities and Challenges for the Governance of Tourism Destinations. *Tour. Plan. Dev.* **2015**, *12*, 479–488. [CrossRef]
42. Park, H.J.; Lee, T. Influence of the 'slow city' brand association on the behavioural intention of potential tourists. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2017**, *22*, 1405–1422. [CrossRef]
43. Zaucha, J.; Brodzicki, T.; Ciołek, D.; Komornicki, T.; Mogiła, Z.; Szlachta, J.; Zaleski, J. *Terytorialny Wymiar Wzrostu i Rozwoju*; Wydawnictwo Difin: Warsaw, Poland, 2015.
44. Cittaslow-Miasta Cittaslow. Available online: https://cittaslowpolska.pl/index.php/pl/o-cittaslow (accessed on 29 April 2023).
45. Danielewicz, J.; Turała, M. Territorial capital as a determinant of development processes in functional areas. Acta Universi-tatis Lodziensis. *Folia Oecon.* **2016**, *2*, 55–68. [CrossRef]
46. Stanisz, A. *Biostatystyka*; Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego: Cracow, Poland, 2005.
47. Kot, A.; Jakubowski, J.; Sokołowski, A. *Statystyka*; Podręcznik dla Studiów Ekonomicznych. Difin: Warsaw, Poland, 2007.
48. Mynarski, S. *Analiza Danych Rynkowych i Marketingowych z Wykorzystaniem Programy Statistica*; Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie: Cracow, Poland, 2003.
49. Howell, D.C. Chi-Square Test: Analysis of Contingency Tables. In *International Encyclopedia of Statistical Science*; Lovric, M., Ed.; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2011. [CrossRef]
50. Bartók, O.; Kozák, V.; Bauerová, R. Online grocery shopping: The customers' perspective in the Czech Republic. *Equilib. Q. J. Econ. Econ. Policy* **2021**, *16*, 679–695. [CrossRef]
51. Stockemer, D. *Quantitative Methods for the Social Sciences*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2019. [CrossRef]
52. Green, A.; Grace, D.; Perkins, H. City branding research and practice: An integrative review. *J. Brand Manag.* **2016**, *23*, 252–272. [CrossRef]
53. Bonakdar, A.; Audirac, I. City branding and the link to urban planning: Theories, practices, and challenges. *J. Plan. Lit.* **2020**, *35*, 147–160. [CrossRef]
54. Braun, E. Putting city branding into practice. *J. Brand Manag.* **2012**, *19*, 257–267. [CrossRef]
55. Institute for Urban Strategies. The Mori Memorial Foundation. Available online: https://mori-m-foundation.or.jp/wordpress/english/ius2 (accessed on 29 April 2023).
56. Gómez, M.; Fernández, A.C.; Molina, A.; Aranda, E. City branding in European capitals: An analysis from the visitor perspective. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2018**, *7*, 190–201. [CrossRef]
57. Kazemi, M.; Hesam, M.; Rad, M.S.; Cheraghi, M. The evaluation of tourism destination brand equity from the female tourist's perspectives (study of 16 cities in Iran). *GeoJ. Tour. Geosites* **2018**, *21*, 112–122.
58. Kladou, S.; Kehagias, J. Assessing destination brand equity: An integrated approach. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2014**, *3*, 2–10. [CrossRef]
59. Bennett, R.; Savani, S. The rebranding of city places: An international comparative investigation. *Int. Public Manag. Rev.* **2003**, *4*, 70–87.
60. Janusz, M. Differences in the Standard of Living among the Populations of the Cittaslow Network Towns in Poland. *Barom. Reg. Anal. I Progn.* **2018**, *16*, 71–82. [CrossRef]
61. Janiszewska, A.; Klima, E. Social and population-related determinants in the development of small towns in Poland. *Olszt. Econ. J.* **2019**, *14*, 27–46. [CrossRef]