

## THE LOGO AS A KEY ELEMENT OF MUNICIPAL BRAND IDENTITY: THE PRACTICE OF BUDAPEST'S DISTRICTS AND HUNGARY'S COUNTY-LEVEL CITIES

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### Abstract

A brand's identity typically consists of three main elements: the brand name, the slogan, and the logo. Therefore, it is essential to study these elements also in the context of municipal branding. This paper focuses on the third component, the logo, a term derived from the Greek word logos, meaning "word." In this sense, a logo can be understood as the visual representation of the "word," that is, the brand name, presented in the most distinctive and appealing way possible. But how successful are Hungarian municipalities in this regard? To answer this question, the study examined the logos of 47 urban entities in total, including Budapest's 23 districts and Hungary's county-level cities. The analysis found that 41 out of the 47 had a distinct logo. The findings reveal that the capital city of Budapest and 19 of its districts have a uniquely designed logo, while 4 districts use their coat of arms for branding purposes. Among the examined county seats and county-level cities, 21 use a unique logo and 2 rely on their traditional heraldic symbols. The collected logos were first analyzed individually to interpret their potential symbolism and intended visual communication. Then, they were grouped according to the color schemes used. Finally, the study assessed how effectively the logos reflect the local identity and distinctive features of each city or district.

**Keywords:** local governance, municipal branding, place identity, visual communication, logo design, city branding, local symbols, urban image.

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, municipal branding has emerged as an increasingly important dimension of local governance and public communication. Cities and municipalities, much like corporations, compete for attention, investment, residents, and visitors. A well-designed and consistently used logo serves not only as a visual identifier but also as a condensed expression of a place's identity, history, and values. In this sense, the logo becomes a key component of visual communication within municipal brand identity, helping to translate local distinctiveness into a recognizable and memorable form.

The topic is particularly relevant today, as municipalities worldwide are seeking to modernize their image and strengthen communication with both residents and external audiences. The creation or redesign of municipal logos is a crucial part of this process, combining respect for local heritage with contemporary expectations of simplicity, digital compatibility, and coherence. This study contributes to the growing academic discourse on place branding and public sector design, in which visual identity is viewed as an essential tool of participatory governance and strategic communication.

The aim of this article is to examine and compare the logos of Budapest and its 23 districts, as well as those of Hungary's county seats and cities with county rights. By analysing these visual symbols, the study explores how municipalities communicate their identity through design, color choice, and symbolic references. Beyond visual analysis, the article also discusses broader implications for municipal branding and the relationship between traditional coats of arms and modern logos.

Although the research focuses primarily on Hungarian examples, its findings have wider relevance. Budapest and other Hungarian municipalities provide instructive case studies of how

local governments can combine cultural heritage and modern communication tools in building coherent and authentic visual identities. The lessons drawn from these cases may serve as inspiration for other cities and regions worldwide that seek to strengthen their public image and enhance civic pride through thoughtful design.

The structure of the paper follows a clear logic. After a review of relevant literature on logo design, the study presents the logos of Budapest and its districts, followed by those of the county seats and cities with county rights. It then analyses the use of colors and recurring visual elements, highlighting distinctive patterns and local references. Finally, the paper summarizes key findings and reflects on what these examples reveal about the current state and challenges of municipal brand identity.

The results of the study may be particularly useful for local governments, communication experts, designers, and scholars interested in urban identity and public sector branding. By identifying visual trends and common design strategies, the article provides insights that can inform future efforts to build coherent, meaningful, and internationally resonant municipal identities.

## 2. Why is a Good Logo Important?

It may sound somewhat simplistic, but according to Galí, Camprubí and Donaire (2017), a brand consists of three core elements of identity: the brand name, the slogan, and the logo. Sharp (2021) adds color to this list as part of the so-called distinctive brand assets and iconography, while Jenés (2022a) also includes typography among these elements.

For leading brands, therefore, not only the right name and slogan matter, but an effective logo and, more generally, a recognizable, strong, and color-distinctive visual identity are also of primary importance. The well-known branding expert Wally Olins, in his book *On Brand* (2004), argues that logos lie at the very heart of branding programs. Others often quote Confucius' saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words", underlining the crucial role of logos, which some consider even more influential than slogans.

Park *et al.* (2013) also emphasize that the logo is a key element of brand identity, visually expressing the essence of the brand and forming the foundation of its relationship with consumers by conveying and reinforcing its core values. Therefore, significant resources should be invested in logo design, as logos that fail to communicate the brand's symbolic and functional benefits or that lack aesthetic appeal cannot unlock the brand's full potential. Conversely, as Masten (1988) argues, when people perceive a logo as having high visual quality, they tend to assume that the product it represents is also of high quality.

Understanding the origin of the word logo also sheds light on what makes a good one. The term derives from the Greek *logos*, meaning "word" (Healey, 2009). Accordingly, the logo can be seen as the visual representation of the brand name.

This representation can take several forms. The most common is when the brand name appears alongside a visual symbol (for example, the Red Bull inscription and its two red bulls). Another version includes only the brand name, but designed in a distinctive typeface (for instance, *Cosmopolitan* magazine).

In rare cases, the brand name does not appear in the logo at all, such as in the cases of Apple, Shell, or the Red Cross. This is possible because, in English-speaking contexts, the logo visually is the word: seeing the apple evokes Apple, the shell evokes Shell, and the red cross evokes Red Cross. However, these are exceptions; in most cases, the brand name should appear, and the primary role of the logo is precisely to represent it effectively.

What, then, makes a good logo? According to graphic designer Paul Rand (as cited in Healey, 2009), the ideal logo is simple, elegant, versatile, practical, and memorable. While this offers a general guideline, more concrete direction is often required in design practice. As Szalay (2018) notes, logo design is a communication process that establishes a visual hierarchy rather than an artistic creation. The goal is to communicate systematically, not to surprise or evoke catharsis.

Cohen and Vartorella (as cited in Hem and Iversen, 2004) argue that a good logo has three essential characteristics:

- It must be recognizable,
- It must be consistently interpretable by the target audience, and
- It must create a positive impact.

According to Szalay (2018, p. 87), Design Theory highlights five key considerations in logo design:

- The logo should be simple and easily readable so that with a quick glance the viewer can understand what brand or organization it represents. It is better to be interesting than boring.
- It should evoke emotion and convey personality. Like the layers of an onion, its elements such as typography, symbols, textures, and colors should reveal themselves in a structured way.
- The logo should communicate on behalf of the organization, creating the first impression and expressing its character even before any words are spoken.
- The logo must be applicable in all contexts and adaptable to the various environments in which it appears.
- The logo should be unique and clearly distinguishable, especially in the market where the organization operates. Two logos that are too similar weaken each other.

If we were to create a more comprehensive checklist of questions regarding what makes a good logo, it might include the following points (Papp-Váry, 2013):

- Does it communicate the brand, its positioning, and its values effectively? For instance, if the brand is primarily targeted at women, does it use a thin, feminine typeface? If it is aimed at men, does it use a bolder one? Do the colors reinforce the message? In simplified associations, white is linked with purity, black with luxury, blue with leadership, purple with royalty, and green with environmental friendliness.
- Is it simple? Is it free from excessive elements? (It is no coincidence that the logos of major global brands have continuously become simpler over time.)
- Does it work in black and white? (Although black-and-white print is increasingly rare, it is still worth ensuring that the logo functions in monochrome, for instance, employees may print documents in grayscale.)
- Does it work in small sizes? (If the logo is significantly reduced, is it still legible and meaningful?)
- Is it clear what the brand is, and is the name readable? (We should not assume we are Apple or Shell, whose symbols alone suffice.)

- Can it be used both horizontally and vertically? (It is generally advisable for a logo to be horizontally oriented, with an approximate 2:1 ratio. This format fits naturally on many surfaces, such as billboards, business cards, email signatures, or building façades. However, since mobile phone screens are vertically oriented, this should also be taken into account.)
- Can it be extended to both offline and online applications? (After all, the logo is only the foundation of the visual identity. It must function effectively on envelopes, letterheads, invitations, advertisements, email signatures, websites, online campaigns, social media, and presentation materials.)
- Can it not be confused with a competitor's logo? (The essence of branding is differentiation. Pepsi's deepening blue and black identity, for example, distinguishes it from Coca-Cola's red.)
- Does it attract attention? (The purple–orange combination of FedEx is instantly recognizable even from afar. The online bookstore Bookline chose neon green not only to stand apart from other book retailers but also from most online companies, since a brand competes broadly for attention, not only within its direct market.)
- Can it be applied to merchandising or promotional items such as baseball caps, pens, or other souvenirs? This aspect is important because, as one of the authors' graphic designer acquaintances once remarked, a key question in logo design is: "Would you wear this logo on a T-shirt?"

Does it work effectively in the digital world? Is it trendy, shareable, and socially appealing? Continuing the previous example: "Would you not only wear this T-shirt but also post a photo of it on social media?" This reflects a much stronger level of brand attachment than merely owning the item, since one might wear it privately but sharing it online expresses identification and pride.

### **3. The Specific Characteristics of City Logo Design**

Designing logos for products or companies is not an easy process, and this is even more true for cities, even though similar principles must be considered. As Piskóti (2012) points out, differentiation is of crucial importance, yet achieving it is more difficult for cities than for corporate brands.

Hankinson (2007) emphasizes that city branding differs from product and corporate branding in several respects, as places are inherently more complex due to their diversity. Similarly, Hem and Iversen (2004) note that city logos should reflect the identity, distinctive characteristics, and values of their territories, as well as their essence and objectives.

Creating a good city logo is therefore essential, yet at the same time a demanding task. One of the main challenges arises from the fact that most cities already possess a kind of "logo", namely their coat of arms. According to the definition by Bertényi (1983), a coat of arms is a usually shield-shaped emblem (symbol) used by individuals or institutions as a distinguishing mark. While these symbols vary by period and country, they are generally colorful, geometrically structured or stylized, often shield-shaped, and inherited over generations.

In most Hungarian municipalities and cities, the coat of arms represents the past and local history, often referring to the city's foundation or key historical events. However, such emblems rarely meet the requirements of modern visual communication, nor are they suitable for attracting tourists or even for conveying an appealing city image to local residents. A coat of arms therefore cannot be considered a logo. While the coat of arms primarily represents the past, the logo usually

symbolizes the present or the desired future. The common solution is to use the traditional coat of arms in official documents, while a distinct marketing logo appears in all other forms of public communication.

- a logo designed to attract tourists,
- a logo to promote investment,
- one or more logos to support local product sales,
- logos of local organizations not affiliated with the municipality,
- the crests and logos of local sports teams, national teams, and major sporting institutions,
- logos of municipal enterprises (for example, public transport companies),
- logos created for special events and programs,
- and so on.

If these elements are not visually or conceptually connected, the result can be an overwhelming cacophony of logos, which makes it extremely difficult to maintain coherent city communication. It should also be emphasized that, however strange it may sound, it is always better to have one good logo that can be used consistently over the long term than several excellent ones that are replaced annually. The reason is simple: in the latter case, there is not enough time for the target audience to become familiar with and emotionally attached to any of them.

As shown by the research of Papp-Váry, Wolf, Farkas, and Szolnoki (2020), which analyzed the tourism logos of European capitals, there is one clear common denominator among city logos: restraint. Cities rarely experiment with provocative or divisive logo designs. The prevailing tendency is toward calm, elegant, politically correct, and minimalist creative solutions. It is even uncommon to find city logos that are particularly decorative, vivid, or rich in color.

#### **4. Background of the Primary Research**

The aim of our research, conducted in the spring of 2022, was to collect and analyze the logos of Budapest's districts as well as those of Hungary's county seats and county-level cities. In the first phase, we attempted to locate the logos of all 23 districts of Budapest and 24 major cities using online research.

We began by visiting the official websites of each district and city. When the logo or slogan was not visible on the homepage, we explored further within the site, searching through older articles and downloadable documents. In many cases, the logo was easy to find, typically appearing in one of the corners of the homepage. However, when it could not be located on the website, we looked for the visual identity manual (*arculati kézikönyv*). In several instances, we only found the Townscape Identity Manual (*Településképi Arculati Kézikönyv*), which is not equivalent to a city brand identity guide. The former concerns architectural and urban design principles, whereas the latter provides detailed rules for the application of brand identity elements, such as logo usage, color specifications, and typography (Kasza, 2022).

Out of the 47 cases examined, we found only two publicly available brand identity manuals that included detailed logo usage instructions with color codes. Since in many instances the official websites contained no such information, we continued our search on Facebook and Instagram pages of the municipalities. As a last resort, we used Google searches, though we primarily aimed to locate the symbols through official communication channels.

The research conducted in spring 2022 revealed that not every city has a logo. In several cases, municipalities and districts continue to use their coat of arms for communication purposes. Among the 47 local governments studied, 41 had invested resources in creating a unique logo,

while the remaining used only their heraldic symbols. The collected logos were then analyzed individually and categorized primarily by color. In addition, we examined the extent to which they incorporated local identity elements or distinctive characteristics. The following section presents these findings.

## 5. The Logos of Budapest and its Districts

In addition to the central logo of Budapest itself, 19 out of the 23 districts had a distinct logo as of spring 2022, when the research was conducted. In most cases, these logos sought to visually represent characteristics unique to the given district or neighborhood.

The official logo of Budapest is also its coat of arms, although in a modern form, featuring the Danube River, the historic buildings of Buda and Pest, and the Holy Crown of Hungary.

The 1<sup>st</sup> District introduced a modern yet minimalist emblem in 2020, incorporating the Buda Castle as a historical reference.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> District's official symbol also functions as its coat of arms: a green, shield-shaped design decorated with beech trees and crosses.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> District opted for a text-based logo in blue with a unique typeface, including its slogan alongside the names of the two neighborhoods forming the district.

The 4<sup>th</sup> District integrated the well-known Water Tower into its logo—an iconic structure more than 110 years old and beloved by residents, even though it is no longer in active use.

The 5<sup>th</sup> District (Belváros-Lipótváros) creatively employs a cube-shaped logo, slightly tilted, containing the Roman numeral V. This design is cleverly reused in various communication materials and even serves as a prefix in the names of municipal enterprises, such as the district's Urban Management Ltd.

The 6<sup>th</sup> District (Terézváros) also uses a square-shaped logo, while reinterpreting its traditional coat of arms rather than abandoning it. The red shield remains, topped with the district's name, "Terézváros". Upon closer inspection, one can discern the Oktogon and the intersecting Nagykörút and Andrásy Avenue stylized within the design.

The 7<sup>th</sup> District (Erzsébetváros) introduced a modern, semi-circular logo in 2017, accompanied by a professional brand identity manual detailing its proper use—a positive example of good practice. The half-circle form may symbolize the boulevards, urban development, or continuity, while also subtly incorporating a partially visible letter "E" referring to Erzsébetváros.



**Figure 1.** Logos of Budapest and Districts 1–7 of Budapest

*Source:* Official websites and related documents of the districts

The 8<sup>th</sup> District (Józsefváros) also uses its coat of arms as the official emblem. The symbol, redesigned in 2012, includes an element representing Pest: a single-gated fortress with a raised portcullis and red tower roof.

The 9<sup>th</sup> District's (Ferencváros) emblem is likewise a coat of arms, displayed against a white background with various shades of green. Within it, one can also find a blue wave symbolizing the Danube and a fortress motif, similarly to the 8th District. The choice of green and white likely connects to the district's famous football club, Ferencvárosi TC, whose team colors are the same.

The 10<sup>th</sup> District (Kőbánya) employs a unique, modern logo. The letter X, rendered in four different colors, visually represents both the Roman numeral for ten and the diversity of the district, while also marking its central location within Budapest. Alongside the logo appears the district's slogan. The organic yet playful shape of the "X" reinforces this dynamic identity.

The 11<sup>th</sup> District (Újbuda) features the Saint Emeric Church on Villányi Street in its logo. Behind the building, blue and green forms merge into a heart shape, symbolizing the district's open spaces, greenery, and sense of community.

The 12<sup>th</sup> District (Hegyvidék) incorporates the district's characteristic green hills and one of its most iconic landmarks, the Erzsébet Lookout Tower, into its design.

The 13<sup>th</sup> District (Angyalföld) also belongs to those districts that use their coat of arms as a logo. Nevertheless, it is a particularly expressive and symbolic emblem. The shield refers to the district's five subareas, each represented by distinct symbols: a cogwheel for the industrial zone, a sturgeon for Vizafogó, an anchor for the former shipyard, and an angel atop the shield representing Angyalföld ("Land of Angels").



8<sup>th</sup> District



9<sup>th</sup> District



10<sup>th</sup> District



11<sup>th</sup> District



12<sup>th</sup> District



13<sup>th</sup> District

**Figure 2.** Logos of Budapest and Districts 8–13 of Budapest  
*Source:* Official websites and related documents of the districts

The 14<sup>th</sup> District (Zugló) uses a square-shaped, distinctive logo. Along the upper left corner, the word "Zugló" appears in an L-shaped layout, encircling several symbolic icons: a baby carriage

representing growth and family life, the St. Anthony of Padua Parish Church located at Bosnyák Square, waves referring to the Széchenyi Thermal Bath, and trees symbolizing the district's suburban, green character.

The 15<sup>th</sup> District's (Rákospalota–Pestújhely–Újpalota) emblem prominently features the Roman numeral XV and the inscription “Budapest Tizenöt” (“Budapest Fifteen”), accompanied by the district's official slogan.

The 16<sup>th</sup> District's (Mátyásföld–Cinkota–Sashalom–Árpádföld–Rákosszentmihály) logo doubles as its coat of arms. Around the district's central symbol, the names of its five constituent neighborhoods appear, along with the motto “Fejlődő Kertváros” (“Developing Garden District”). The emblem incorporates several characteristic elements: an oak branch with acorns, a rose, water motifs, and suburban greenery. The numbers in the design are also meaningful: five roses and five acorns represent the five areas that make up the district—Sashalom, Árpádföld, Cinkota, Mátyásföld, and Rákosszentmihály.

The 17<sup>th</sup> District (Rákosmente) has a unique and delicate logo, featuring a small flower. According to the district's Urban Design Manual (Rákosmente Municipality, 2017), this symbol was inspired by the cherry blossom season in Rákoskert, which is celebrated for its natural beauty.

The 18<sup>th</sup> District (Pestszentlőrinc–Pestszentimre) took a playful approach to its logo design. The emblem features a green-and-blue splash forming a heart shape—similar to that of the 11th District's logo. Within the blue area appears the word “Pest”, while in darker, smaller letters beside it are “Szentlőrinc” and “Szentimre”. Read together, they form the names of the two neighborhoods, Pestszentlőrinc and Pestszentimre.

The 19<sup>th</sup> District (Kispest) also emphasizes color harmony, using blue, green, and purple tones. Like several other districts, it incorporates the Roman numeral XIX as a central element. The logo also features well-known local landmarks, reinforcing the district's identity through its architectural heritage



14<sup>th</sup> District



15<sup>th</sup> District



16<sup>th</sup> District



17<sup>th</sup> District



18<sup>th</sup> District



19<sup>th</sup> District

**Figure 3.** Logos of Budapest and Districts 14–19 of Budapest  
**Source:** Official websites and related documents of the districts

The 20<sup>th</sup> District (Pesterzsébet) also uses its coat of arms as a logo. As is typical for such emblems, it features symbols reflecting historical heritage and local identity. In this case, the shield-shaped design is divided by the waves of the Danube. In the upper section, an anchor represents navigation and the district's riverside location, while in the lower section, a gear wheel symbolizes its industrial past. The crown atop the shield refers to Queen Elisabeth, after whom the district is named (Pesterzsébet.blog.hu, 2010).

The 21<sup>st</sup> District (Csepel) introduced a unique logo in 2018, which, according to Mayor Lénárd Borbély (2018), symbolizes progress and renewal. The emblem incorporates the district's traditional colors and visually reinforces Csepel's official slogan.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> District (Budafoke-Tétény) designed a logo that recalls the area's historic tradition of viticulture. The loess soil of the Tétény Plateau provided ideal conditions for grape cultivation for decades (Budafoke-Tétény, 2023). The grape cluster motif is embraced by a heart-shaped figure in blue and green, which, when viewed closely, subtly forms the number 22.

Finally, the 23<sup>rd</sup> District (Soroksár) features in its emblem the line drawing of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Nagyboldogasszony Főplébánia-templom), one of the district's most significant landmarks. The shield-shaped logo is composed of three colors, yellow, blue, and dark gray, creating a harmonious and dignified visual identity that connects heritage and modern municipal representation.



20<sup>th</sup> District



21<sup>st</sup> District



22<sup>nd</sup> District



23<sup>rd</sup> District

**Figure 4.** Logos of Budapest and Districts 14–19 of Budapest

*Source:* Official websites and related documents of the districts

If we summarize the logos of Budapest and its 23 districts, it can be concluded that out of the 24 cases examined, 20 possess a unique graphic emblem, while 4 use their coat of arms as a logo. It is also apparent that all 24 symbols refer in some way to historical heritage or characteristic local features. In three instances, the logo or coat of arms includes two mythical creatures guarding the shield, a motif typical of heraldic tradition. Moreover, in eight cases, the district's slogan appears alongside the logo, which is significant since logos and slogans are often closely intertwined elements of place identity and municipal communication.

## 6. Logos of County Seats and Cities with County Rights

During the research, 23 Hungarian county seats and cities with county rights were examined. At the time of analysis, 21 of these municipalities had adopted a unique logo. Let us now review them in alphabetical order.

The emblem of Békéscsaba, the county seat of Békés County, depicts the two Lutheran churches of the city stylized against a rising sun, symbolizing faith and renewal.

The logo of Debrecen, seat of Hajdú-Bihar County, features a colorful and uniquely shaped design. The vibrant colors evoke the city's world-famous Flower Carnival, while the shape itself represents the contour of the city. This is an intriguing choice, as those familiar with Debrecen

immediately recognize it, whereas newcomers may initially find it abstract.

Dunaújváros, a city with county rights in Fejér County, selected its current emblem through a public logo design competition. The logo incorporates the Danube River, as well as leaves and spiral motifs, symbolizing closeness to nature and continuous growth. The city's slogan is also integrated into the design.

The logo of Eger, the county seat of Heves County, prominently features the Eger Castle, a historic landmark and symbol of civic pride. The typography is clean and elegant, with blue and gold tones, and the city's slogan appears in all capital letters beneath the image.

The emblem of Érd, located in Pest County, contains several symbolic elements: a green leafy tree with a golden five-pointed crown hidden in its canopy, referencing Érd's medieval origins in the Árpád era. Additionally, the number 40 written in gold marks four decades since Érd obtained city status.

The logo of Győr, the county seat of Győr-Moson-Sopron County, is a modern reinterpretation of the city's coat of arms. The shield-shaped emblem includes a five-pointed crown, the patron saint of the former Győr Castle and town, and three wavy lines symbolizing the rivers Danube, Rába, and Rábca, which converge within the city's territory.



Békéscsaba



Debrecen



Dunaújváros



Eger



Érd



Győr

**Figure 5:** Logos of Hungarian county seats and cities with county rights

*Source:* Official websites and other municipal documents

The logo of Hódmezővásárhely, the county seat of Csongrád-Csanád County, was redesigned in 2021, following a public vote in which residents selected the new visual identity from several proposals. In the two-round competition, the winning design came from a local graphic artist, and

it has since served as the city's official emblem. The blue and yellow colors, representing the municipality, form the letter "H", while the silhouette of the Downtown Catholic Church rises prominently from the blue field.

The logo of Kaposvár, located in Somogy County, is particularly distinctive: the letter "K" symbolizes the layout of Kossuth Square, the most popular central square of the city. This square hosts several of Kaposvár's landmark buildings, including the Town Hall, the Cathedral of the Assumption of Our Lady, the Erzsébet Hotel, the Kapos Hotel, the Dorottya House, the former Palace of Finance, and the Home for the Little Citizens of the Homeland. Within the design of the "K", one can discern stylized representations of the Town Hall, the Cathedral, the former Palace of Finance, and the Erzsébet Hotel, thus merging typography and urban identity.

The emblem of Kecskemét, the county seat of Bács-Kiskun County, combines the city's coat of arms with a colorful "Kecskemét" wordmark. The shield-shaped symbol is topped by the Hungarian Holy Crown, while a rearing goat appears on green hills against a red background, referencing both the city's name ("kecske" = goat) and its heraldic heritage.

The logo of Miskolc, the county seat of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, features a minimalist design based on the initial letter "M", reflecting the city's modern and straightforward visual identity approach.



Hódmezővásárhely



Kaposvár



Kecskemét



Miskolc

**Figure 6:** Logos of Hungarian county seats and cities with county rights

*Source:* Official websites and other municipal documents

The logo of Nagykanizsa, located in Zala County, was designed in 2021 by Dávid Vercz, who explained that the city's coat of arms served as the foundation for the updated symbol (M-B.Gy., 2021). The design employs a single-line technique, incorporating elements of the original heraldry, such as the black eagle, the sword, and the crown, thus blending historical continuity with contemporary aesthetics.

The logo of Nyíregyháza, the county seat of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, conveys a strong sense of dynamism and vitality. It features blue and green colors, commonly found in modern municipal branding, forming the shape of a heart from which a human figure emerges,

symbolizing progress and community spirit. The city's slogan, "Többet ad" ("Gives More"), is also integrated into the design, emphasizing generosity and development.

The logo of Pécs, in Baranya County, reflects the city's rich historical heritage through a circular composition divided into three main sections. The design references the period of Ottoman rule, represented by a crescent and star, while at its center appears a top-down depiction of the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, one of Pécs's most recognizable landmarks. At the top of the circle, a three-pointed crown symbolizes continuity and tradition, and the city's name, Pécs, is inscribed in uppercase letters at the base of the emblem.



Nagykanizsa



Nyíregyháza



Pécs

**Figure 7:** Logos of Hungarian county seats and cities with county rights

*Source:* Official websites and other municipal documents

The logo of Salgótarján, located in Nógrád County, was created through a public design competition titled "Salgótarján – 100 Years as a City". The winning entry by Máté Putnoki emphasized a modern and minimalist appearance, effective use of negative space, and a sense of distinctiveness (Salgoremek.hu, 2021). The logo features iconic local landmarks, such as the Karancs Hotel and the Zenthe Ferenc Theatre, while the city's name is incorporated into the design. The number 100 is cleverly intertwined with the text to form an infinity symbol, representing the endless potential of the century-old city.

The city of Sopron, in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, is widely recognized for its slogan "The City of Loyalty and Freedom" and its most famous landmark, the Fire Tower. Appropriately, the city's logo depicts the outline of the Fire Tower emerging from a heart, symbolizing both heritage and emotional connection.

The logo of Szeged, the county seat of Csongrád-Csanád County, takes a playful typographic approach, using yellow and blue colors that reference the city's identity. The design integrates local motifs within the lettering itself, such as the Flood Memorial, the River Tisza, and the shape of the Downtown Bridge, all of which evoke Szeged's distinctive architectural and geographical character (Tóth, 2017).



Salgótarján



Sopron



Szeged

**Figure 8:** Logos of Hungarian county seats and cities with county rights

*Source:* Official websites and other municipal documents

The county seat of Fejér County, Székesfehérvár, uses a modernized version of its coat of arms as its official logo. The shield-shaped emblem features blue and red as its base colors, with a castle wall in the center and a golden crown placed above it, symbolizing the city's royal heritage.

The logo of Szekszárd, in Tolna County, reflects the city's most famous association: wine. Appropriately, the modern, shield-shaped emblem incorporates vineyard-inspired lines that symbolize grapevines and trellises, referring directly to the Szekszárd wine region. A crown adorns the top of the logo, highlighting the city's historical significance. The design was selected through a public competition (Boraszportal.hu, 2016).

The logo of Szolnok, the county seat of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County, emphasizes one of its iconic landmarks, the Tiszavirág Bridge. This striking pedestrian bridge, inaugurated in 2011, takes its name and shape from the mayfly, a unique insect that symbolizes the Tisza River's ecosystem. The bridge's decorative elements resemble mayfly wings, celebrating both engineering innovation and natural beauty (Info.szolnok.hu, 2022).

The logo of Szombathely, located in Vas County, was created in 2017 during the Saint Martin Commemorative Year. It features several of the city's key landmarks, including the Cathedral of Our Lady, Saint Martin, the Evangelical Church, and the Synagogue (Nyugat.hu, 2017). The emblem is notable for its vivid use of color, with each motif rendered in a different hue, symbolizing diversity and heritage.

Tatabánya, the county seat of Komárom-Esztergom County, uses its coat of arms as its official logo. The green shield prominently features the turul bird, a national symbol of Hungary. The black upper section contains miners' hammers and small houses, both referencing the city's industrial and mining past (Nemzetijelkepek.hu, 2023a).

The city of Veszprém, the county seat of Veszprém County, combines its logo with the slogan "The City of Queens", a phrase that reflects its royal and historical importance. The slogan refers to Queen Gisela, the wife of King Stephen I, who favored Veszprém and was crowned there. The crown motif in the logo incorporates red and green elements, echoing the colors of the Hungarian national flag.

Finally, Zalaegerszeg, the county seat of Zala County, also uses its coat of arms as its logo. The shield-shaped emblem depicts Mary Magdalene offering a laurel wreath toward a border fortress, symbolizing repentance, strength, and historical continuity (Nemzetijelkepek.hu, 2023b).



**Figure 9:** Logos of Hungarian county seats and cities with county rights

*Source:* Official websites and other municipal documents

Among the 23 cities examined, only two cases were found where the municipality used its official coat of arms as the logo: Tatabánya and Zalaegerszeg. At the same time, there were four cities — Győr, Kecskemét, Nagykanizsa, and Székesfehérvár — where the coat of arms served as the conceptual foundation, which was then further developed and modernized into a contemporary emblem.

## 7. Classification of the Examined Logos by Color

Color plays a crucial role in graphic design. Through colors, we can express various messages and interpretations, and their impact extends beyond aesthetics; they influence human emotions and perceptions. A person's favorite color, for example, often reveals aspects of their personality, and the colors that surround us can affect our mood and energy.

When it comes to symbolism, colors carry deep cultural and psychological associations, making them indispensable elements of branding. As Éva Pálfi, creator of the brandstyling concept and author of *Stylish Brand Strategy Designed for Maximum Impact* (2016), highlights in her chapter on color psychology, red instantly captures attention; it is passionate, dynamic, and stimulating. Its shades are friendly, symbolizing love and inspiring positive actions. Blue, on the other hand, conveys peace and calm, enhances work efficiency, supports intuition, and suggests reliability, intelligence, and commitment. Black evokes power and authority, generating strong emotions and maintaining an enduring sense of elegance.

Harmony between colors is also a key element in creative design. As Johannes Itten explains in his seminal work *The Elements of Color* (1970), color harmony refers to the combined effect of two or more colors. Yet, perceptions of harmony and contrast are often subjective; individuals rarely evaluate them with complete objectivity. Itten also distinguishes between warm and cool

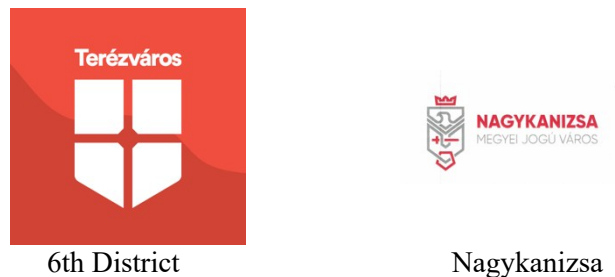
colors, a contrast that implies proximity or distance. Cool colors include blue, purple, and green, while warm colors consist of red, yellow, and orange. In composition, he emphasizes the importance of maintaining a consistent and clear stylistic direction.

In analyzing the collected logos, several dominant color patterns emerged. A blue-green palette with heart-shaped motifs appeared five times, demonstrating a recurring visual language among Hungarian municipalities. Among all hues, blue proved to be the most prevalent color, symbolizing stability, trust, and connection to natural elements such as rivers or the sky, features often integral to a city's identity.

### 7.1 Red Logos

When we think of red, passion is often the first association. As Elisabeth Sullivan (2008) notes, red represents energy, passion, and even danger. From a marketing perspective, red is also a powerful attention-grabber, frequently used in sale signs and promotional materials. It is the defining color of several iconic global brands, including Ferrari in the luxury sector, as well as Netflix, YouTube, Algida, Nutella, Heinz, Nintendo, Puma, H&M, and LEGO, which employ red to evoke excitement and emotional engagement.

Within our examined sample, logos that fully or partially incorporate red include Budapest's 6th District (Terézváros) and the city of Nagykanizsa. In both cases, the red tone conveys vitality, tradition, and visual prominence, reinforcing the symbolic and emotional dimensions of their urban identities.



**Figure 10: Logos in Red**  
**Source:** Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

### 7.2 Green Logos

The color green is almost immediately associated with the environment, as it is one of the most prevalent hues in nature. Green has a calming effect and evokes growth, renewal, and balance. It is therefore unsurprising that the universal recycling symbol uses green to signify sustainability and ecological awareness (Sullivan, 2008).

In branding, green often conveys ideas of freshness, naturalness, and stability, though its application can vary widely. Globally recognized brands such as Starbucks and Monster Energy employ green to project vitality and energy, while BP Oil, Spotify, Tic Tac, and Land Rover have also adopted it, despite the fact that not all of them embody environmentally conscious values. This illustrates how the symbolism of green extends beyond ecological associations to encompass notions of innovation, well-being, and modernity.

In the analyzed dataset, logos and coats of arms that prominently feature green, either fully or partially, include those of District 2, District 8, District 9, and District 17 of Budapest, as well as the cities of Miskolc and Tatabánya. Across these examples, green communicates a strong connection to nature, community, and sustainable urban identity, reflecting how local

governments increasingly seek to align their visual communication with environmentally responsible values.



**Figure 11:** Logos in Green

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

### 7.3 Blue Logos

Alongside green, blue is one of the most frequently occurring colors in nature, symbolizing purity, openness, and efficiency (Sullivan, 2008). Its strong psychological associations with trustworthiness, stability, and professionalism have made it one of the most popular choices in corporate visual identity. Major global corporations such as Facebook, HP, SAP, and Skype rely on blue as a core branding element, signaling reliability and technological competence.

From a design perspective, blue is a versatile and universally appealing color that harmonizes well with almost any palette. It is often perceived as calm and authoritative, which explains why it is also a common choice among public institutions and municipal brands seeking to communicate credibility and order.

Within the examined set of Hungarian municipal logos, blue appears either fully or predominantly in those of District 3, District 7, District 15, District 19, and District 20 of Budapest, as well as in the logos of the cities of Győr, Sopron, and Veszprém. In these cases, blue reflects not only the presence of water such as the Danube or local rivers but also embodies values of trust, harmony, and civic integrity, which are central to contemporary urban governance and visual communication.



**Figure 12:** Logos in Blue

**Source:** Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

#### 7.4 Black Logos

Black is a true classic in visual communication. Whether in typography or clothing, it is a timeless and elegant choice that conveys sophistication, authority, and strength. This is why leading global brands such as Adidas, Apple, Mercedes-Benz, Gucci, Chanel, Prada, and Bentley rely on black as a central design element, associating it with luxury, exclusivity, and refinement.

From the perspective of municipal branding and local governance, black can project stability, seriousness, and institutional dignity, which may be particularly relevant for historic or culturally rich cities. However, its use requires balance: in many cultural contexts, black is also linked to mourning or loss, and excessive use may unintentionally evoke somber associations that conflict with the city's desired image.

Among the examined Hungarian municipalities, Kaposvár, Pécs, and Szekszárd employ black in their logos. In these cases, the color enhances the clarity and visual contrast of the emblem while reinforcing an aura of heritage, prestige, and authority—key values often emphasized in municipal identity design and place communication.



**Figure 13:** Logos in Black

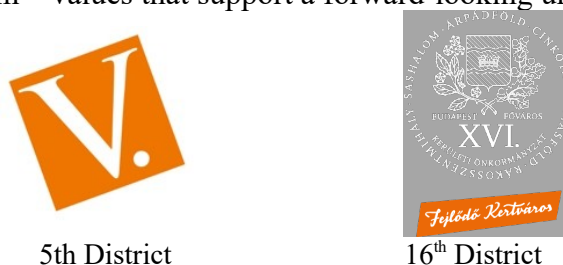
**Source:** Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

#### 7.5 Orange Logos

Orange is a playful and optimistic color that radiates warmth, creativity, and enthusiasm. As Sullivan (2008) observes, it shares the attention-grabbing power of red but expresses it in a friendlier, more approachable way. Orange evokes energy, openness, and vitality, making it particularly suitable for visual identities that seek to convey innovation or youthful dynamism.

International examples include Nickelodeon, Walkman, GSK, SoundCloud, Orange, and Fanta. These brands use orange to signal positivity, creativity, and accessibility, qualities that can also be relevant in municipal branding when a city wishes to appear lively and welcoming.

In our research, only one fully orange logo was identified among the examined municipalities: that of Budapest's 5th District, where the color underscores the district's modern and innovative spirit. Additionally, in the 16th District, the slogan "Fejlődő Kertváros" ("Developing Garden City") is displayed within an orange rectangle, symbolizing growth, friendliness, and optimism—values that support a forward-looking urban identity.



5th District

16th District

**Figure 14: Logos in Orange**

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

## 7.6 Multicolored Logos

This category includes logos that combine multiple colors, creating a more complex and dynamic visual identity. When warm and cool tones are paired, they evoke a simultaneous sense of calm and stimulation, producing balance and visual tension at once (Bear, 2020). Such color combinations can communicate both diversity and harmony, which makes them particularly effective in representing urban communities characterized by variety and inclusiveness.

Among the examined cases, Budapest's 13th District and Székesfehérvár use a blue and red color palette. This pairing not only conveys strength and energy but also reflects a sense of tradition and modernity. Interestingly, these are the same colors found in the logos of two local sports teams, the Vasas SC of the 13th District and the Fehérvár FC, further reinforcing local identity and emotional attachment through a shared visual language.



13th District



SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR  
Székesfehérvár

**Figure 15: Logos in Blue and Red**

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

The blue and green color palette dominates the logos of the 1st, 11th, 12th, 18th, and 22nd

districts of Budapest, as well as the city of Zalaegerszeg. In these municipal logos, the combination of blue and green conveys balance, harmony, and sustainability, often evoking associations with nature, water, and environmental awareness.



**Figure 16:** Logos in Blue and Green

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

In the case of Budapest's districts, the prevalence of these hues may also be explained by design trends at the time the logos were created. Blue and green were widely favored colors in contemporary municipal branding, symbolizing clean environments, openness, and livability, qualities that local governments often aim to emphasize in their visual communication and place identity.

### 7.7 Blue and Yellow/Gold Logos

The combination of blue and yellow (or gold) is featured in the logos of Budapest, the 23rd district, Békéscsaba, Eger, Érd, Szeged, and Szolnok. Designers often favor this pairing for its strong visual contrast and symbolic richness. According to Wroblewska (2016), the blending of these two colors can signify growth, renewal, freshness, and fertility.

In municipal branding, blue typically represents stability, trust, and calmness, while yellow or gold conveys optimism, light, and prosperity. When used together, they create a balanced and uplifting aesthetic, reflecting cities' aspirations toward development, vitality, and positive transformation within their visual identity.



**Figure 17:** Logos in Blue and Yellow/Gold

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

The logo of Salgótarján combines black and yellow (or gold), a pairing that creates a striking visual contrast. This combination is distinctive because it merges a classic, powerful color with a vibrant and cheerful one. The bright yellow tones evoke a sense of well-being, energy, and optimism, while black adds strength, stability, and sophistication to the composition.

In color psychology, yellow is often associated with wisdom and intellect, making this contrast particularly symbolic in a municipal context. The interplay of these hues conveys a message of dynamic renewal grounded in resilience, reflecting the city's ambition to balance heritage and progress through its visual identity.



**Figure 18:** Logo of Salgótarján: black and gold contrast

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

The logos of the 10th, 14th, and 21st districts of Budapest, as well as those of Debrecen, Dunaújváros, Kecskemét, Nyíregyháza, and Szombathely, can be described as polychromatic or color-rich. In these cases, no single dominant color can be identified, as a wide spectrum of hues has been applied. In some logos, each letter features a different color, while in others, the entire palette is blended within the emblem itself.

This vibrant use of colors can symbolize diversity, inclusiveness, and openness, but it may also evoke a sense of playfulness and childlike innocence, akin to spontaneous “color splashing”. From a municipal branding perspective, such designs often aim to convey a welcoming, creative, and community-oriented identity, emphasizing the coexistence of various groups and ideas within the same urban environment.



**Figure 19:** Polychromatic logos

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

## 8. Distinctive Features in the Examined Logos

Several municipalities have chosen to incorporate a local landmark or distinctive feature into their logos. This approach is particularly effective in enhancing recognizability and ensuring that the visual identity remains memorable and tied to place identity.

Among the districts of Budapest, the following use recognizable local elements in their visual communication:

- 1st District: the Buda Castle, reflecting historical heritage and cultural prestige.
- 4th District: the Water Tower, an emblematic structure symbolizing local tradition.
- 6th District: the Oktogon and the intersection of the boulevards, representing urban dynamism.
- 11th District: the Saint Emeric Church on Villányi Street, highlighting religious and architectural heritage.
- 12th District: the Elizabeth Lookout Tower, referring to the district's natural elevation and panoramic views.
- 13th District: multiple symbolic elements, such as a sturgeon (viza), anchor, gear wheel, and angel, each denoting different neighbourhoods and historical associations.
- 14th District: the St. Anthony of Padua Parish Church at Bosnyák Square, a key local landmark.
- 20th District: symbols of navigation and industry, reflecting Pesterzsébet's historical economic activities.
- 23rd District: the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady in Soroksár, a central architectural and spiritual landmark.

Such site-specific symbolism demonstrates how municipal branding can integrate cultural heritage, architectural identity, and community values into a coherent visual communication strategy, strengthening the connection between citizens and their local government.



**Figure 20:** Logos featuring local landmarks or characteristic elements

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

Among the county seats and cities with county rights, several municipalities also incorporated landmarks or distinctive features, characteristic elements into their logos. Such design choices reinforce local identity and create instant recognition for both residents and visitors.

Examples include:

- Békéscsaba, which features stylized representations of its Reformed Churches.
- Eger, depicting the iconic Eger Castle.
- Győr, which includes the former Győr Fortress in its design.
- Hódmezővásárhely, where the Downtown Catholic Church is symbolically represented.
- Kaposvár, whose logo integrates architectural outlines of the notable buildings surrounding Kossuth Square.
- Pécs, where the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul appears as a central motif.
- Salgótarján, incorporating the Karancs Hotel and the Zenthe Ferenc Theatre.
- Sopron, where the Fire Tower, the city's most recognizable landmark, takes center stage.
- Szolnok, represented by the Tiszavirág Bridge, a symbol of modern architecture and local identity.
- Szombathely, which integrates multiple landmarks such as churches and historic sites into a single emblem.
- Finally, Tatabánya, whose logo prominently features the Turul Monument, a national symbol of Hungarian heritage.

These examples illustrate how local governments strategically employ architectural and cultural icons in their visual identities to strengthen municipal branding and convey civic pride through design.



**Figure 21:** Logos featuring local landmarks or characteristic elements

*Source:* Websites and other official documents of the districts and cities

It is advantageous that designers incorporated these landmarks into the logos, as they make it easier to identify the given city or town at a glance. This visual connection is valuable not only for tourists, who can quickly associate the logo with a recognizable place, but perhaps even more so for the local residents, for whom such symbols strengthen community identity and a sense of belonging.

## 9. Summary

For our research, we collected and examined the logos of 47 Hungarian cities and districts, out of which 41 had an identifiable logo or emblem suitable for analysis.

As our findings revealed, Budapest and 19 of its districts have individually designed logos, while four districts use their historical coats of arms as substitutes. As emphasized earlier, this is a somewhat debatable decision, since a coat of arms is not the same as a logo, as it carries different values, functions, and design principles. In all examined cases, some reference to historical heritage or local characteristics could be identified. In eight cases, the slogan of the district was also visible alongside the visual emblem, which is significant given that slogans and logos often work as an integrated part of place identity.

Among the county seats and cities with county rights, 19 have unique logos, while for Tatabánya and Zalaegerszeg no official graphic symbol could be found during the 2022 research.

Four cities reused or redesigned their coats of arms, incorporating them as modern identity elements alongside their slogans.

Most municipalities aimed to visually express a key strength or distinctive feature of their territory in the logo. In several cases, the resulting identities appeared particularly attractive and contemporary, showing that city marketing and municipal branding are becoming increasingly significant in Hungary and are taken seriously by local governments.

At the same time, several important conclusions should be remembered. As Jenes (2022b) points out, while the logo is a central component of a city's visual identity, it is only one element among many. It should be considered alongside all other content and visual elements that identify the city and distinguish it from its competitors (Jenes, 2022b). Similarly, Töröcsik (1995) argues that beyond the symbolic system of a city, such as its logo and slogan, the city image also encompasses the city's role and position within the settlement network, its natural and social geography, and its built environment. In addition to city image, urban culture plays a vital role, comprising local traditions, customs, hospitality, and mindset. Finally, urban communication includes not only media representation but also public life, events, and organized activities. According to Töröcsik (1995), it is the conscious, coordinated development of these three (city image, urban culture, and urban communication) that can produce a strong, coherent city marketing effect.

This perspective is echoed by leading international experts in the field. Robert Govers (2013), in his article *Why place branding is not about logos and slogans*, stresses that cities often spend too much time and money designing logos and slogans, while more crucial efforts related to urban development and reputation management receive far less attention. Likewise, Jeremy Hildreth (2013), in his essay *The joys and sorrows of logos and slogans in place branding*, argues that ideally, no more than 10 percent of a city's branding budget should be spent on logos, slogans, and other visual markers, while the remaining 90 percent (or more) should go toward actions and initiatives that strengthen identity, "things that speak louder than words or logos".

These insights offer valuable guidance for municipalities and their leaders or communication professionals across Central and Eastern Europe. Having a logo does not automatically mean having a real, respected, and beloved city brand. A strong municipal identity requires more than a visual mark, as it demands authentic, lived values and consistent action that make the logo truly meaningful.

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