

City Portal  
as a portrait of cultural peculiarities –  
English and Polish website analysis  
in the search for cultural values

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# **ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY**

City Portal  
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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY  
ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

MASTER OF ARTS

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By Bozena Joanna Kulczycka

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Since its introduction to the public, in the early 1990s, the internet has continually been growing in popularity. Spreading all over the globe, it became central to the lives of millions of people. With this in mind, city councils, among other institutions and organisations, more increasingly rely on the internet as the prime medium of reaching their audiences by creating sophisticated and multifaceted websites. These websites not only serve as city directories and as marketing and promotion tools, but also, give an interesting insight into the cultural peculiarities of their creators.

This paper investigates cultural dimensions portrayed in the sample of city portals through an analysis of its information content including forms of visual communication and accompanying textual context.

Websites of three Polish and three British (English) cities were investigated in terms of communication characteristics of cultural variables identified by a number of researchers including Hofstede and House. These communication characteristics were analysed against a variety of website features such as information content and information architecture, navigation, icons and symbols, graphics, images and multimedia, as well as textual context.

Websites characteristics to a certain degree reflected the cultural dimension scores attributed to them by researchers.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter One</b> .....	2
1.1. <i>Culture, national culture and classifications of cultural differences</i> .....	2
<b>Chapter Two</b> .....	13
2.1 <i>City websites as a representation of cultural values</i> .....	13
2.2 <i>Research Questions and Methodology</i> .....	14
2.3 <i>Previous research</i> .....	15
<b>Chapter Three</b> .....	22
3.1. <i>Modern Cities and their representation on the internet.</i> .....	22
3.2. <i>Forms, structure and information architecture of the websites.</i> .....	25
3.2.1 <i>English websites</i> .....	25
3.2.2. <i>Polish websites</i> .....	31
3.3 <i>Pictures, graphics, multimedia and text as means of representation of culture on the website</i> .....	45
3.3.1 <i>Cultural representations of Uncertainty Avoidance</i> .....	46
3.3.1.1 <i>Uncertainty Avoidance summarised</i> .....	49
3.3.2 <i>Cultural representations of power and authority</i> .....	51
3.3.2.1 <i>Power and authority summarised.</i> .....	76
3.3.3 <i>Cultural representations of Individualism and Collectivism.</i> .....	78
3.3.3.1 <i>Collectivism &amp; Individualism summarised</i> .....	94
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	97
<b>Appendices</b> .....	99
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	112

# List of Figures

<i>Figure 1 Wells City Council website- homepage</i> .....	26
<i>Figure 2 Colchester City Council website- homepage</i> .....	28
<i>Figure 3 Greater London Authority website-homepage</i> .....	30
<i>Figure 4 Kolno City Council website in the new, spring design</i> .....	33
<i>Figure 5 Legnica City Council webpage (spring version)- homepage</i> .....	36
<i>Figure 6 Warszawa City Council website- homepage</i> .....	38
<i>Figure 7 Cllr. Tony Robbins Mayor of Wells</i> .....	55
<i>Figure 8 Some of the Colchester councillors and the two indistinguishable mayors</i> .....	56
<i>Figure 9 Some members of the Council Management Team</i> .....	56
<i>Figure 10 Representations of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Colchester</i> .....	58
<i>Figure 11 Londoners</i> .....	59
<i>Figure 12 Greater London Authority</i> .....	60
<i>Figure 13 London Assembly</i> .....	61
<i>Figure 14 Aerial picture of London</i> .....	61
<i>Figure 15 Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London</i> .....	62
<i>Figure 16 Team London</i> .....	63
<i>Figure 17 Mayor of London as an example to follow for the public</i> .....	64
<i>Figure 18 Andrzej Duda, the mayor of Kolno welcomes users to the website</i> .....	66
<i>Figure 19 The mayor’s functions</i> .....	69
<i>Figure 20 The mayor of Legnica on his own website</i> .....	70
<i>Figure 21 The mayor of Legnica meeting the residents and during functions</i> .....	71
<i>Figure 22 Start of the virtual walk of Legnica</i> .....	71
<i>Figure 23 Virtual walk: the deputy mayor of Legnica</i> .....	72
<i>Figure 24 Councillors and mayor of Legnica</i> .....	73
<i>Figure 25 Prominent positions of the mayor, the deputy mayor and the city hall as symbols of power</i> .....	73

<i>Figure 26 Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, the mayor of Warszawa.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Figure 27 Warsaw's officials during the making of the new mayor .....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 28 People of Wells as presented in the website .....</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Figure 29 Variety of topics supported by the use of images showing people.....</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Figure 30 Computer-confident elderly lady.....</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Figure 31 Individualist focus on people shown in groups .....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Figure 32 Focus on website visitors.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Figure 33 Londoners in the website .....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Figure 34 'London- the best big city in the world'- animation collage.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Figure 35 London's website dedicated to younger users.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 36 The Family Picnic in Kolno.....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Figure 37 Young entertainer in the website of Kolno.....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Figure 38 Students in the website of Legnica.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Figure 39 Girl receiving an award from Legnica's mayor.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Figure 40 Some of the Honorary Citizens of the City of Legnica .....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Figure 41 John Paul II beatification counter from the website of Warszawa .....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Figure 42 Varsovians in the website of Warszawa's city council .....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Figure 43 The collage shown in the context of Social Policy in the website of Warszawa</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>Figure 44 Polish elderly lady using a computer.....</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>Figure 45 Individuals in the website of Warszawa, authored by private photographers.....</i>	<i>93</i>

## List of Tables

<i>Table 1 Scores for the Hofstede IBM study: Great Britain &amp; Poland</i> .....	18
<i>Table 2 Country rankings for the GLOBE study: England &amp; Poland</i> .....	19
<i>Table 3 Word count of the homepages</i> .....	40



## **Introduction**

The internet is quickly becoming the dominant medium of communication all over the world. To some degree, its global impact on cultures has caused uniformity of thought and values. Extensive research of websites, chat and email messages, however, has proven that communication is still very much influenced by the culture, in which it originated.

With this in mind, I have undertaken this analysis of Polish and English websites in order to investigate how these cultures differ in their representations on the internet and which cultural dimensions are visible in the websites.

Qualitative analysis of six city council portals concentrated on forms, structures and information architecture as well as information content. Forms of visual communication such as images, graphics and videos were also examined, together with pieces of text.

The study has shown significant differences in the projection of power and authority as well as variations in the depiction of individuals. Differences in the usage of regional and national symbols were also discovered.

# Chapter One

## 1.1. Culture, national culture and classifications of cultural differences

Being able to name, classify and measure cross-cultural differences precisely and meticulously has been the goal of a number of researchers working in the field of intercultural communication. Many of them have presented ambitious and interesting, although, often conflicting frameworks for identifying cultural variations.

<sup>1</sup> The models have been subject to rigorous scrutiny by fellow researchers followed by either criticism or recognition. Despite all the efforts, there does not seem to exist an ideal, all-encompassing framework able to accurately measure perfectly defined cultural variables.

Some of the frameworks, nevertheless, have proven themselves as useful templates in a variety of fields where communication between people from different cultures takes place by helping to explain communication difficulties through pinpointing cultural differences as well as indicating similarities.

This chapter will review the research conducted on cultural dimensions outlining the most prominent works in the area of value-based cultural frameworks.

In the first part of the chapter, I will present a number of definitions of culture with an attempt to filter its core characteristics. Then, to complement the abovementioned definition, I will briefly present some available models illustrating

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<sup>1</sup> Nardon and Steers (2006) refer to the existing state of cross-cultural research as “the culture theory jungle” which they explain as the „situation in which researchers must choose between competing, if sometimes overlapping, models to further their research goals and then defend such choices against a growing body of critics’.

the layers of culture. This will be followed by a discussion on the appropriateness of national-level of cultural analysis. Next, I will focus on the models of national cultures as proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, Schwartz and the GLOBE project led by House.

Culture is extremely complex and is therefore difficult to define in a way which would fully encompass its every aspect. Many scholars representing various branches of research have attempted to produce a universal, inclusive definition that would become unanimous. In 1952, Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn collected and classified 164 definitions of culture in a book of more than 200 pages.<sup>2</sup> Since then, Lustig & Koestler (2010) note, many other scholars proposed additional approaches and definitions.

Gullestrup (2006, p.21) claims the concept of culture is „almost impossible to grasp and to work with’ citing Barth (1994) who comments on the fleeting nature of culture’s form and content: “one cannot handle anything which changes boundaries and content at one and the same time”.

Bearing in mind the difficulty of creating the universal definition of culture, I will present a number of definitions relating to the field of intercultural research with the purpose of „sifting out’ the core characteristics of culture:

- "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action." (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952 cited by Adler, 1997, p.14)
- "Culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another (...) the system of collectively held values." (Hofstede, 1984, p.51)

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<sup>2</sup> Kroeber, A.L. and C. Kluckhohn (1952), *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

- “Culture is a learned system of meanings that fosters a particular sense of shared identity and community among its group members. It is a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community”. (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p.10)
- “Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural norms, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.” (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p.4)

The array of the definitions of culture is complemented by models presenting its layers. The most basic model of culture, the ‘iceberg model’ consists of two layers: the invisible layer and the visible layer. Hofstede proposes the ‘onion’ model of culture which presents values as the core- the deepest, the most hidden manifestation of culture and symbols as the most superficial layer with rituals and heroes in between. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner propose a similar model with basic assumptions at its core. The two models are combined by Spencer-Oatey, who proposes values and basic assumptions to be placed together in the inner core of the model encircled by the level of ‘beliefs, attitudes and conventions’.

Looking at the definitions and models above, the following description appears to serve as a common denominator for culture, although, it must be stressed that culture is much more than that:

Culture is an abstract entity which is learned. It involves Beliefs, Values, Norms and Social Practices. Culture affects behaviour but also serves an explanatory role to the behaviour of others. Culture consists of various levels, some of which are easily observable (for instance words which carry specific meaning to those who share culture) towards the most difficult to understand inner layer which includes values and basic assumptions. Culture is shared by a group of people and helps distinguish this group from other groups.

Whilst comparing groups of people with the purpose of distinguishing cultural differences one has to consider the important question of the appropriate resolution for the level of cultural analysis. Cultures, as collective types of homogeneities, can be differentiated on organisational, national, and sub-national levels. People often refer to such notions as European or Latin culture, the former of which, for instance, encompasses a great number of sub-cultures such as German, Polish or French Culture, which in turn include Bavarian, Kashubian, youth, Muslim and „*starbuckian culture*‘. The world *culture* can be applied to „any size of social unit’ that, Schein (1985 cited by Gullestrup, 2006, p.19) claims, had the opportunity to learn and stabilize its view of itself and the environment around it’. Triandis (1994, p.19) criticises the use of a lone factor with regards to culture:

*—fr to avoid thinking of nationality, religion, race, or occupation as the only criterion that defines culture. The use of a single criterion is likely to lead to confusion, as would happen if you put all people who eat pizza frequently into one cultural category!”*

Single categories such as a particular social system will never be one hundred percent identical with, or will equate to culture (Gullestrup, 2006). Cultures mix, merge with, and into each other, and run over national borders (Gullestrup, 2006; Schwartz, 1999) which stresses the need to take into account more than just one factor when talking of cultures.

Geertz (1973 cited by Gullestrup, 2006, p. 37) points out the difficulty in attempting to analyse a cultural group with full appreciation to their individualities:”In any particular society, the number of generally accepted and frequently used culture patterns is extremely large, so that sorting out even the most important ones and tracing whatever relationships they might have to one another is a staggering analytical task”. This view is shared by Gullestrup himself (2006, p.36) who maintains that:

*—The mere fact that single individuals at one and at the same time are part of- or members of- several different non-harmonious, non-integrated cultures which merge with each other without clearly defined boundaries, and which are in a constant flux renders any type of cultural analysis or cultural understanding extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible.”*

Due to the difficulty or even potential unfeasibility of such in-depth research, this paper will focus on the culture from the angle of nationality and national borders. Generalising the whole nation brings the risk of stereotyping and therefore the recognition of variability in the uniformity of common values, in particular the existence of *individuality* in national groups must not be forgotten. Martin and Nakayama (2010) propose dialectic approach to culture and communication as means to „help avoid stereotyping others and misusing that kind of knowledge in cultural interactions’. They identify six dialectics that operate interdependently in intercultural interactions. This approach, they argue, helps to emphasize that cultures and cultural knowledge are shaped in relationship to other cultures, that culture in some contexts is stable and dynamic in others and encourages us to think both about the differences and the similarities.

Analysing culture from the angle of national group has a number of pragmatic advantages. Hopkins (2006, p.18) writes:

*—within these [cultures of a particular geographical area] there will be many subcultures of regions, towns, districts within towns and a myriad of other affiliations, such as gender, social class, religious, corporate and generational. Each of these will display its own cultural manifestation, although each will almost certainly be recognizable as part of the overall national culture.”*

Dahl (2004) maintains national boundaries have been the preferred level of resolution (and countries the preferred unit of analysis) for the two following arguments: 1) the nationality of a person can easily be established (which is not

the case with sub-cultures), 2) support for the notion that people coming from one country will be shaped by largely the same norms and values as their co-patriots.

Whilst appreciating the fact that national borders do not demarcate cultures, Schwartz (1999) supports the national level of cultural analysis providing the following reasons :

*—There is usually a single dominant language, educational system, army, and political system, and shared mass media, markets, services and national symbols (e.g. flags, sports teams). This is less the case, of course, in nations where ethnic or other groups form distinctive cultural groups that live separate and substantially different lives. The descriptions of national culture presented here for such heterogeneous nations refer largely to the value culture of the dominant, majority group.”<sup>3</sup>*

Finally, I will argue that cultural analysis according to national borders proved to work as a concept with a number of researchers dealing with cultural differences.

I will now turn to presenting some of the most prominent of these scholars.

In 1961, Florence Kluckhohn employed previous research of her husband Clyde Kluckhohn, and together with Fred Strodtbeck, argued that there is a limited number of problems common to all human beings and that there is a limited number of solutions to these problems which led them to propose a theory of culture based on value orientations. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck identified five value orientations: *Relationship with Nature, Relationship with People, Human Activities, Relationship with Time and Human Nature*. These values were represented on a three-scale continuum according to the attitude/beliefs of people with regards to

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<sup>3</sup> Since this paper will focus on comparing Polish and British cultural constructs it seems appropriate to consider whether these two countries are „homogenous enough’ to be investigated with the simplification of „nation=culture’ in mind. I argue that Poland, with its fairly homogenous language, religion and political system can be regarded in this way. United Kingdom, on the other hand is much more multicultural, however, still the distinctive cultural groups do not form a separate, dominant group, but rather form the part of British culture. In order to minimise the impact of major cultural groups in UK, I will concentrate on analysing the websites of English cities.

those dimensions. The model was one of the earliest models of culture and has served as the foundation stone for several later models.

Edward T. Hall, an American anthropologist has published two influential books —*The Silent Language*” (1959) and —*The Hidden Dimension*” (1969), in which he described two dimensions of culture that he identified: High-context vs. *Low-context* cultures and *Polychronic* vs. *Monochronic* time orientation. The first dimension distinguishes cultures according to the degree of context in their communication. High-context messages are characterised by little explicit information in the body of the message; they are indirect, efficient and economical. Low-context communication, on the other hand, is direct, with the message itself conveying the desired meaning. The second concept proposed by Hall, deals with the ways cultures perceive time. In monochronic cultures, time is inflexible, interpersonal relations are subject to the schedule and tasks should be handled one at a time. In polychronic cultures, time is more fluid, schedule is subordinate to interpersonal relationships and many tasks are handled at the same time. Although both of these dimensions are easily observable and very useful, they have their weaknesses: the first one proves difficult to be measured more precisely or placed on a scale, while the second one suffers from the lack of empirical data which makes the concept difficult to apply in research (Dahl, 2004).

Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001) proposed the framework which gained such headlines as „one of the most frequently cited research efforts’ (Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina & Nicholson 1997) and the „most widely used model of cultural differences in the management literature’ (Nardon & Steers, 2006). Hofstede’s data derived from his study of around 116,000 IBM employees from countries all over the globe. Based on the premise that different cultures can be distinguished



with accordance to the differences in what they value, Hofstede identified four dimensions: *Power Distance*, *Individualism/Collectivism*, *Masculinity/Femininity* and *Uncertainty Avoidance*. *Power Distance (PDI)* is defined as “the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”. In societies with high power distance, organisations tend to be hierarchical and everyone has a place in this hierarchy which they likely accept. There is also a strong dependency relationship between the subordinates and people of authority. In cultures characterised by small power distance, authority tends to have a negative connotation with people attempting to appear less powerful. *Individualism/Collectivism* is concerned with the importance of the individual versus the group interests. Individualistic cultures place value to the self-actualisation and self-expression and the person’s identity is connected with themselves and their immediate family. In collectivist societies, people identify themselves with larger community and the interests of this community take precedence over personal aspirations. Another dimension differentiates between *Masculine* and *Feminine* Cultures. The masculine societies are aggressive, driven by achievement, status and success. The strong are admired. Feminine cultures, on the other hand, are modest, people-oriented, concerned with the welfare of others; the weak ones being treated with sympathy and care. *Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)* is the index which deals with the degree of uncertainty that can be tolerated by a society and the impact of this degree on rule making. Countries with low UA exhibit high tolerance for ambiguity with little need for rules and laws to control this uncertainty, while societies with high UA require the opposite to cope with unpredictability. In his later work, Hofstede introduced the fifth dimension described as *Long-term vs. Short-term orientation*. Long-term oriented

cultures focus on future and persistence, whilst short-term orientation represents stability and attention to tradition, past and present.

Hofstede's model has received substantial attention which not only involved positive responses, but also hefty criticism. For the purpose of this research, however, I believe that application of Hofstede's framework is relevant and I will refer to his work later in this study.

For now, I will complete the scene of most prominent research in the field of cross-cultural differences by presenting the works of few other important scholars.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) have presented a somewhat similar model to the one created by Hofstede, especially in relation to some of the value orientations which appear identical. The dimensions identified include: *Universalism vs. Particularism* (rules vs. relationships), *Individualism vs. Communitarianism* (the individual vs. the group), *Neutral vs. Emotional* (relating to the amount and range of feelings displayed), *Specific vs. Diffuse* (range of engagement with others in various areas of life), *Achievement vs. Ascription* (concerned with the way of according status in a culture), *Sequential vs. Synchronic* (associated with the way of thinking about the time) and *Internal vs. External Control* (with regards to nature). Both the work of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's and of Hofstede concentrates in their research questionnaires on the preferred outcomes or behaviours i.e. the focus is on the ultimate goal state (Dahl, 2004). Contradictory to Hofstede, however, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner not only give attention to work values, but also include questions relating to leisure situations.

In his study called Schwartz Value Inventory (SVI), Schwartz (1992, 1994) asked the participants about the importance of 57 values as guiding principles in

their lives. He derived 10 value types on individual level and, most importantly -on cultural level 7 value types (that can be summarised into 3 value dimensions): *Conservatism*, *Intellectual Autonomy*, *Affective Autonomy* (all forming one dimension), *Mastery* and *Harmony* (forming the second dimension), and *Hierarchy* together with *Egalitarian Value Type*. Schwartz' attitude to measuring preferred values that need to guide behaviour rather than preferred states, has proven to be yet another good way of approaching the identification of cultural dimensions.

One of the other major and recent studies of intercultural differences is the *Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE, 2004)* research led by Robert House. The researchers involved in the study collected data from 62 countries and compared the results which allowed them present nine cultural dimensions of *Power Distance*, *Uncertainty Avoidance*, *Assertiveness*, *Institutional Collectivism*, *In-Group Collectivism*, *Future Orientation*, *Performance Orientation*, *Humane Orientation* and *Gender Egalitarianism*. The study focused on understanding the weight of cross-cultural differences on leadership practice and leader/manager behaviour. It certainly was one of the most ambitious and broadest research projects attempting to identify cultural differences. The findings of House and associates with regards to cultural dimensions will also be employed in this study in order to support the use of Hofstede's research.

In this chapter, I focused on finding the best way of approaching the concept of culture and examined the issue of analysing culture from the level of nationality. I further presented the reader with the brief introduction to value-based cross-cultural research.

In Chapter Two, I will start with a brief discussion of city websites as products of culture. I will then outline research questions of this study followed by a description of methodology and an overview of previous research.

## Chapter Two

### 2.1 City websites as a representation of cultural values

Since its introduction to the public, in the early 1990s, the internet has quickly become central to the lives of millions of people. Owing to the fact that it was the first medium to give voice to the *hoi polloi* on the worldwide scale, it evolved into the most important medium of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its popularity has been used by companies and organisations for commercial, political and religious reasons.

Owing its own website representing the institution in the virtual world became an essential part of the real world for every highly-regarded establishment. This is no different with cities, which feel compelled to be represented online. With current technology and trends, this must not, however, be just a website'. It must be attractive, sophisticated, representative of the town and accessible to both wider public and to the investors looking for business.

City websites not only serve as city directories and as marketing and promotion tools, but also, give an interesting insight into the cultural peculiarities of their creators. Brock (2006) writes that web content reproduces existing norms, rules and power relations, citing Harrison and Zappen (2003) who claim that „technologies are infused with the values and social goals of their creators'. Brock (2006) further argues:

*"Information is not neutral; it has value based on its relevance to the cultural and social orientation of its recipient. Social and cultural values and behaviours are articulated through information. Values are discursive; that is, we exchange and reinforce values through discourse between individuals or between individuals and institutions."*

He claims that technology not only enables faster and wider reach of information, but also allows the transmission of thoughts, ideas and beliefs of the content creator. Thus, I propose that, as any other type of cultural creation, websites are not culture-free. Although they sometimes are being manipulated in order to be accessible to the widest possible audience, I argue they can never be completely culture-neutral. This view was confirmed by the studies of Singh, Zhao and Hu (2003) who attempted to analyse whether the web is „a culturally neutral medium or a cultural document impregnated with local cultural values’. They have discovered that not only do the websites reflect the values of the country of their origin, but also they significantly differ with regards to cultural dimensions.

## **2.2 Research Questions and Methodology**

The aim of this paper is to investigate what cultural values are being portrayed in the sample of city portals through an analysis of pictures and accompanying textual content.

The questions which I intend to address are:

- *What are the differences in content and form among websites of Polish and English cities?*
- *How do Polish and English cultures vary in their representation on the websites?*
- *What English and what Polish cultural values are portrayed?*

In order to answer the above questions the following strategies will be employed:

- I will qualitatively analyse the content of websites by examining their forms and structures i.e. information architecture, themes/ topics covered, graphical layout.

- I will describe the means which the Polish and the English cities use to represent themselves on the web i.e. the use of pictures, graphics, multimedia and accompanying text including the use of emblems, flags, colours, etc.

- I will use the *dimensions of culture* framework by Hofstede and House in order to pinpoint the cultural differences of Poland and England. I will then relate the previously defined cultural differences to the use of text, images and structures of the websites.

In this study, I will focus on an in-depth analysis of six websites: three Polish and three English ones. I shall concentrate on examining the virtual portals of cities. This provides the advantage of dealing with similar genre and, which comes with it, the similar purpose of communication and desired audience in mind of the creators. The portals chosen include the official city council authored websites of two largest and, at the same time, the capital cities of London and Warszawa (Warsaw) and two small cities of around 10.000 inhabitants: Wells in England and Kolno in Poland. The analysis will also cover two cities of an average size of around 100.000 citizens: Colchester and Legnica.

## **2.3 Previous research**

The current studies in the search for cultural values represented on the internet include, but are not limited to, the exploring chat room, social networking and email communications and analysing websites.

Most of the research of cultural influences on websites has concentrated on the implications for website design, often with concern for user preferences (Singh & Baack (2004), Singh & Pereira (2005), Marcus & Gould (2000), Singh, Zhao & Hu

(2003)), or focusing on design and layout of objects as *cultural items* (Badre (2000), Callahan (2006), Cyr & Trevor-Smith (2004)).

The use of Hofstede's framework for investigating cultural differences on the websites has proven to be popular- along with Hall- with a considerable number of researchers (Jin (2010), Ahmed, Mouratidis & Preston (2008), Würtz (2006), Hermeking (2006), Callahan (2006), Marcus & Gould (2000)).

A substantial amount of research has focused on societies which are geographically distant (e.g. different continents) which thus might imply cultural distance. Jin (2010) examines how cultural peculiarities are reflected in the construction and content of banner advertisements on the websites of China, Korea, Japan and USA. Singh, Zhao & Hu (2003) explore a depiction of cultural values on websites from China, India, Japan and USA in order to determine whether or not they are culturally neutral. Wen-Jiang (2008) investigates the effect of national culture on marketing websites on the example of China and USA. Ahmed, Mouratidis & Preston (2008) aim to explore local cultural values in Malaysian and British World Wide Web environment. They argue that most studies which addressed the issue of local culture in website design have focused on the USA as the representative of western, and China or Japan, as the representatives of Asian cultures.

There seems to be a gap in research with regards to investigating cultural differences on the websites of Eastern European, and, to be precise, Polish websites, in comparison with English online cultural produce.

Bakacsi, Sandor, Andras and Viktor (2002) point out that the region of the Eastern Europe is „understudied due to its socialist past'. They also draw attention to the fact that it was not included in the 1980s original IBM research of Geert Hofstede.



Hofstede, has instead provided the estimated scores for Poland (and other Eastern European countries), which he comments on together with Kolman, Noorderhaven and Dienes (2002):

*—The use of estimations is a perfectly legitimate way of extending the applicability of Hofstede's indices, as long as the difference in reliability between these estimates and proxies and the original scores based on Hofstede's research are taken into account".*

The estimated scores in Poland were arrived at using the instrument called Value Survey Module 1994 (VSM). The instrument was based on the original IBM questionnaires extended by items to measure the long versus short-term orientation. It was tested in Poland on 103 university students of business and economics. The research of Nasierowski and Mikula (1998) which studies the cultural dimensions of Polish and Canadian managers has also contributed to the scores of Hofstede which were calibrated to match the original IBM study.

Bearing in mind the popularity of Hofstede's framework in conjunction with investigating cultural differences on the websites, despite all the criticism, I will employ some of the cultural dimensions that he has described. In particular, I will concentrate on the three dimensions which signify the largest cultural differences between Poland and Britain, namely Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance and Individualism and Collectivism. The table below outlines the scores for the Hofstede IBM study (Hofstede, 2001)

Country	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance	Individualism (vs. Collectivism)	Masculinity (vs. Femininity)	Long/ Short Term Orientation
Great Britain	35	35	89	66	25
Poland (estimated)	93	68	60	64	32

*Table 1 Scores for the Hofstede IBM study: Great Britain & Poland (Hofstede, 2001) (higher scores indicate higher levels of the dimension)*

Following Kolman, Noorderhaven and Dienes's (2002) claim of the necessity of taking into account the difference in reliability between estimates and the original Hofstede's scores and also in order to limit the potential influence of the shortcomings of Hofstede's estimated indices, I will employ the GLOBE study (2004) which has been introduced in Chapter One. It must be noted that while Hofstede talks of British values, House et al. only describe England, which might account for some differences.

The figures in the table below represent the rankings for the 62 countries studied. For the purpose of this work, however, only the rankings of Poland and England have been presented with regards to the nine dimensions identified by House et al. Lower scores here indicate higher position in the ranking of the countries studied and thus higher level of the dimension.

Country	UNC	POW	COLL I	COLL II	ASS	GEN	HUM	FUT	ACH
England	13	36	30	53	32	14	48	11	34
Poland	50	40	16	25	34	4	52	59	43

*UNC= Uncertainty Avoidance, POW= Power Distance, COLL I= Institutional Collectivism, COLL II= In-Group/ Family Collectivism, ASS= Assertiveness, GEN= Gender Egalitarianism, HUM= Humane Orientation, FUT= Future Orientation, ACH= Achievement, Performance Orientation*

*Table 2 Country rankings for the GLOBE study: England & Poland (Koopman et al. 1999)*

Both Hofstede and House indicate that Poland is significantly more collective than either Great Britain or England. The collectivist dimension in the GLOBE study has been presented in a twofold way: Collectivism I: “the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action” and Collectivism II: “the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families”.

Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions of the GLOBE study both have their origins in the dimensions identified by Hofstede (as have the dimensions of Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness) (Koopman et al. 1999). The results arrived at by House et al. differ significantly, however, compared to Hofstede’s figures. While Hofstede sees Poland in relation to Great Britain as a country with relatively high Power Distance (defined as “the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”), House (with the following definition in mind: “the degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally”) arrives in his research at results which indicate no significant power distance differences

between England and Poland placing them in the ranking characterised by smaller power stratification.

Similar lack of convergence in results is observable in the case of Uncertainty Avoidance. Hofstede defines UAI as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.” The definition proposed by House is somewhat different: “The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events”. It is the differences in defining that may partly be accountable for the divergence in results. Other factors might be various research methods, different samples and purposes of the research as well as the use of England vs. Great Britain in the studies concerned. Commenting on the opposite pattern of the Uncertainty Avoidance in comparison to Hofstede, Koopman et al. (1999) write:

*—We cannot fully compare the results, because Central and Eastern Europe were not included in Hofstede’s data set and again there are differences in operationalization of the dimensions. In GLOBE, typical items for Uncertainty avoidance were: In this society, orderliness and consistency are stressed; societal requirements and instructions are spelled out in detail; rules and laws cover almost all situations”.*

The Hofstede- House dilemma has been dealt with by a number of researchers (Smith 2006, Javidan 2006, Hofstede 2006, Maseland & Van Hoorn 2009, Venaik & Brewer 2010) and is not the purpose of this study. I will, however, look at both understandings of the concepts of Power Distance and of Uncertainty Avoidance with an attempt to find indicators of these dimensions in Polish and English websites.

Chapter Three will start with a discussion of various digital representations of a city. Next, forms, structures and information architecture of the websites will be explored moving from English to Polish city portals. This will be followed by a

discussion of visual forms of communication throughout the websites from the point of view of cultural dimensions of *Uncertainty Avoidance*, *Power Distance* and *Individualism-Collectivism*.

## Chapter Three

### 3.1. Modern Cities and their representation on the internet.

With the rapid pace in which modernisation takes over the urban areas, less and less do they resemble the forms which people traditionally conceptualised as „cities’. This not only applies to the physical boundaries of the cities, which in the past more clearly distinguished between the urban infrastructure and rural areas, but also with regards to abstract representations of the city of today. Cities became „complex dynamic places shaped by flows of people, things and information across contrasting architectural and geographic spaces’ (Hardey, 2007). Graham (2004, p.113) writes that urban regions are becoming saturated by a myriad of computerised interactions:

*—Every physical movement has its computerised trace. Every urban landscape crosscuts and interweaves with, multiple and extended sets of electronic sites and spaces.”*

He further argues that cities and urban life can increasingly be perceived as computerised constructs making it untenable and pointless to separate the city from the cyber:

*—They [the city and the cyber] are one and the same. They are two sides of the same process. And they are mutually constructed and utterly fused.”*

The abstract representations of cities on the internet have been referred to in a number of ways, with the terms often used interchangeably: *cybercities*, *virtual cities*, *digital cities*, *simulated cities*. Graham (2004) distinguishes 3 types of such cities. Literal simulations of specific real cities which use 3-D techniques to represent the city on the web is one of the types. The second type is an

imaginative city with no reference to any particular place, constructed through mass on-line participation and used in gaming and in provision of wide ranges of services. These are also referred to as „non-grounded’ virtual cities by Aurigi & Graham (1998). The third type of internet cities are ones which involve the use of a web site by municipality or local authority in order to „feed back positively on to the economic and social development of a specific city’. Aurigi & Graham (1998) tag these as „grounded’ virtual cities and divide them into commercial („glossy advertising and promotional spaces’) and „public’ electronic spaces which support political, social and cultural discourses of the city. Another type of the virtual city, somewhat similar to the first model described above, has been introduced through the usage of Google Street View technology which provides the panoramic 360° field views of real cities captured as images not discriminating people but focused mainly on their surroundings.

I shall now return to the concept of public digital cities, as an analysis of these is the focal point of this study.

Caire (2008) claims the development of public digital cities in Europe owes to the interest of European Community which launched its first Telecities Programme in 1993, followed by projects such as Eurocities, Intelcities and e-Agora which focused on development and the sharing of ideas and technologies among cities.

The portals I will concentrate on in this study are all official public digital cities. Polish portals include the cities of Warszawa, Legnica and Kolno. The British websites include London, Colchester and Wells. Warszawa and London are the capital cities and their population exceeds 1 mln and 7 mln people, respectively. Legnica and Colchester have the population of around 100.000 people, while Kolno and Wells around 10.000 citizens. I will start with describing the information

content, structures and forms of the websites focusing mainly on the home pages as the most important and most representative parts of the portals.



## **3.2. Forms, structure and information architecture of the websites.**

### **3.2.1 English websites**

Wells website <http://www.wells.gov.uk/>

City of Wells has a rather simple, short website which does not require long scrolling for information. All the information has been placed on a white sheet decorated with a „watermark’ of the city’s emblem and laid against a shaded green background. This serves as a template for each of the pages of the website. The name of the city has been positioned in the prominent place, on the top of the page towards the left hand side. On the left, there is a vertical menu with key subjects, and just below it there is a list of links to outside websites. In the centre of the home page, the eye is drawn immediately to the picture of Wells Town Crier and the welcome text which states the purpose of the website. Most of the information in the website has been incorporated into the hierarchical structure of the vertical menu where the information has been categorised in accordance to subjects/topics considered important by the designers of the website. There is no search engine present which requires the users to browse for the information needed, rather than quickly find it. Most of the content of the website has been produced in plain text format enhanced by simple graphics with no animation and a few photographs.

In conclusion, the design of the website is simple and seems rather dated taking into consideration the interactive features available nowadays. It relies on referring users to outside websites such as those of a wider administrative function (e.g. Somerset county council, Mendip district council websites).

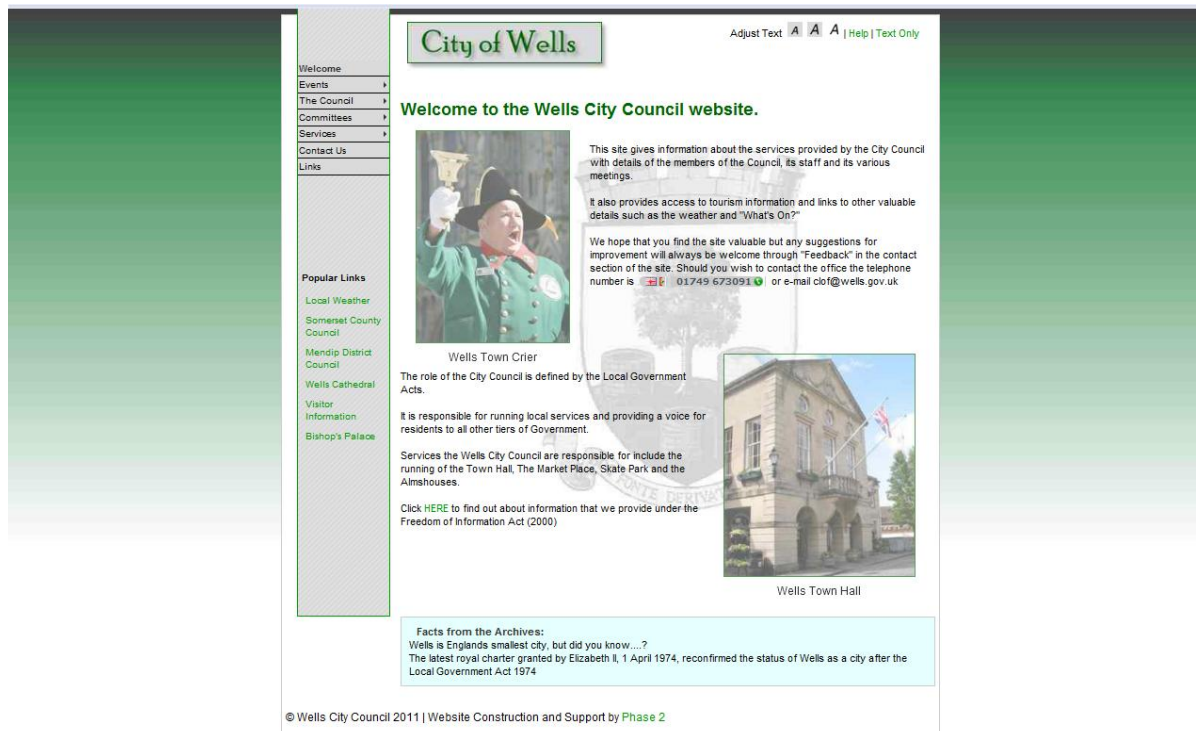


Figure 1 Wells City Council website- homepage

Colchester website <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/>

The information on the website of Colchester has been placed on a pastel beige background structured in a few separate boxes and laid around a central window which shows slides of items currently *In focus*. Top of the page has been taken by a banner presenting Colchester castle with a catchy, promotional phrase: “A *place where people want to live, work and visit*” and a commercial logo of the city – and not the coat of arms- has been placed to the left. Just below it, all the services have been ordered in alphabetical order with the help of the A-Z Index. The information here has been categorised with accordance to a widely know reference of the alphabet, which is a step towards acknowledging the importance of the users in the website design. Left hand side vertical menu has been divided into three sections. In the top one, the information has been categorised into actions that users could potentially take whilst visiting the website: *Apply, Book, Check, Find, Pay, Report*. The middle menu corresponds to the promotional

phrase of the city: *Living in Colchester, Working in Colchester, Visiting Colchester*, again, focusing on people by referring to their actions. Structuring information in this way, and not in categories and subcategories considered important by the designers of the websites, helps users find information and thus shows the appreciation of the users' time and their goals when visiting the portal. After clicking on any part of the vertical menu, the page is filled with a brief description of the category and subcategories displayed in same-sized rectangular boxes accompanied by vivid images. The lower levels of the website offer individualisation options such as emailing the website to a friend, printing out a copy, „tweeting', posting on facebook or rating the page. Navigational features include options to go to next, previous or index sections, as well as breadcrumbs trails<sup>4</sup>.

Information has been presented in various forms and structures throughout Colchester website. It is relatively easy to find required piece of information with the variety of browsing options and: alphabetical, task and topical content organisation methods and relatively consistent formatting.

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<sup>4</sup> Method of website navigation showing the users where they currently are, for example: Main Site> About the city> History> The Medieval Period



Figure 2 Colchester City Council website- homepage

London website <http://www.london.gov.uk/>

London's website appears simpler than the one of Colchester, despite being a much larger city. The website is somewhat similar to Colchester's in terms of structure, with the central use of the slide show window and menus built around it. Websites of both (and the website of Wells) use rather light, pastel colours. It does not require long scrolling to get to the bottom of the page- in fact, the home page is short and economical in information and the use of vertical arrows implies the availability of more information after clicking.

In the top left corner, where the designers of the other five described websites placed either the city's name, the logo, or its emblem, the designers of this website have placed london.gov.uk. 'london.gov.uk' despite functionally being a domain name becomes a logo on its own right. This „re-branding' stresses the increasing commercialisation of the city with the need to differentiate itself from the

competition and promote a modern, forward-thinking image. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) claim the phenomenon of city marketing is not a new idea:

*—conscious attempt of governments to shape a specifically-designed place identity and promote it to identified markets, whether external or internal is almost as old as civic government itself.”*

It was, however, Kavaratzis and Ashworth argue, only recently acknowledged as a valid activity for public sector agencies. Boyer (1996, p.138) writes:

*—Developing an image of the city in an age of visual saturation appears to be a problem, precisely because awareness of the physical space of the city is disappearing or dematerialising— the result (...) of new digital information and communication technologies”.*

The usage of domain name as a brand logo of London in the image creating process is an attempt to effectively reach the modern society by referring to *the abstract* and moving away from *the physical* side of the city. This further underlines the fact that the boundaries of *the physical* and *the abstract* are increasingly blurred, to which Graham (2004:113) refers when naming cities and urban life „*computerised constructs*’.

Coming back to the structure of the website, it contains one main horizontal menu of only five tabs (plus the home page tab) covering the most important issues. The same menu has been copied to the bottom of the page with the submenus extended providing extra support to find required information. Consistency of naming and order of items has been maintained and the menu stays in place when entering the subpages of the website. The centre of the page has been devoted to the slide show window which shows self changing clickable images. The top of the page provides a search box and a register/log in button. Registering on the website (also an option in Colchester portal) allows posting comments and taking part in the discussions, managing the preferences and receiving email alerts

„direct from the mayor’. Most of the subpages have been organised in the similar way with both main horizontal menus still present, subcategory menu visible on the left and a link to share the information with other through the means of a variety of social media.

The website is extremely vast and contains hundreds of subsites with a lot of information efficiently condensed under few general headings on the home page.

The form of the content varies greatly from blog entries, articles, brochures, downloadable documents and video clips.

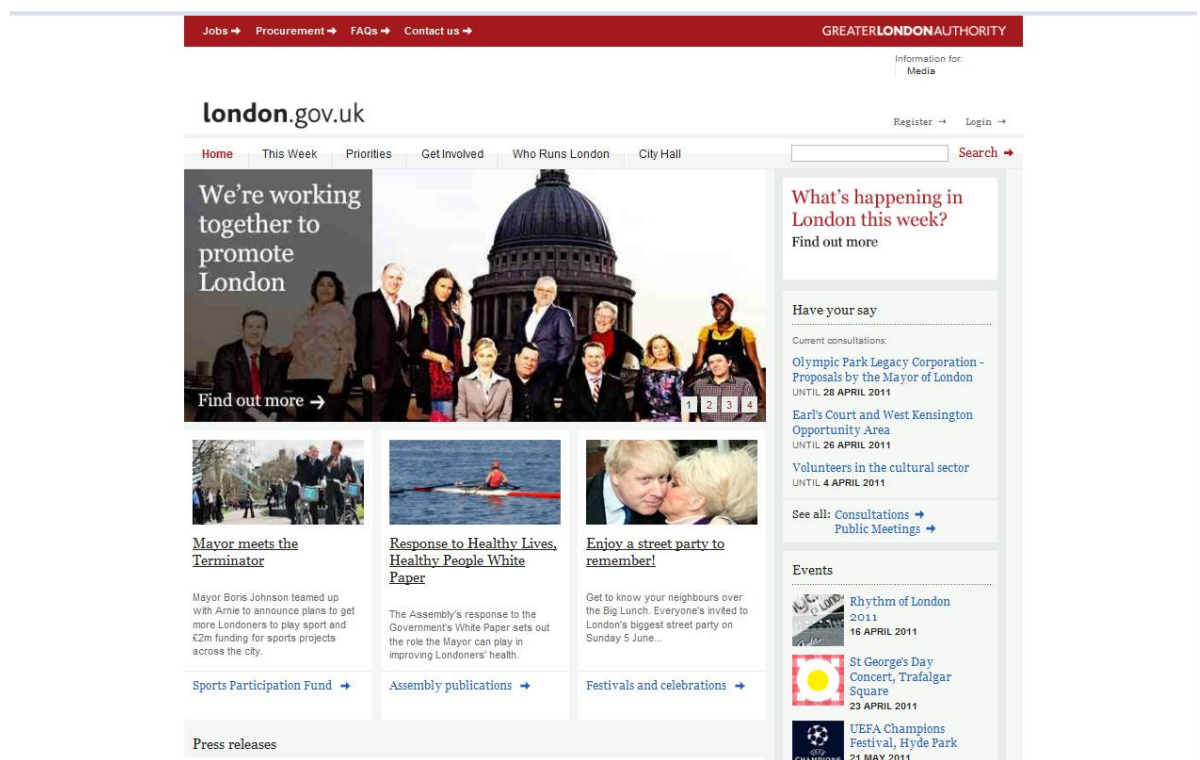


Figure 3 Greater London Authority website-homepage

### **3.2.2. Polish websites**

Kolno website <http://www.umkolno.pl/>

The homepage of Kolno's website appears more complex than the one of Wells, or, in fact, any of the British websites described above. This is due to it being much richer in information and requiring long scrolling to get to the bottom of the page. The background of the website is dark red in colour and imitates a brick wall with a white sheet on top containing most of the information. There is a considerable amount of yellow elements throughout the website matching the background colours of Kolno's coat of arms, which together with the city's name, has been placed in the left towards the top of the page. Top of the page is filled with a banner showing the winter landscape of the most important buildings in the city. There is a decorative element<sup>5</sup> in the website which provides a sort of time frame for the users. Additionally, there is a piece of information saying today's date and the name day. Also, information of where the users are in the website has been presented in the form of the breadcrumbs trail. Topics of the menu in the homepage have been categorised as considered important by the designer of the city's council. The centre of page is filled with the picture of the city's mayor and his message to the users of the website of Kolno. Below the mayor's message there is a variety of banners and clickable pictures advertising both public/community matters and commercial issues<sup>6</sup>. Both types of these notices have been mixed together and have not been assigned separate categories. The

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<sup>5</sup> Snow, which appears to be coming from the image of the clouds, has covered some elements of the navigation in the website

<sup>6</sup> Public matters include the advertisements of the Easter Market, courses for the farmers, education and work fairs, city council bank account number, the rules and regulations of the city portal. The commercial adverts include private schooling, work portals and a restaurant advert.

left hand side of the page is filled with a vertical menu of the latest local news arranged in chronological order. Towards the bottom of the page there are icons of the European Social Fund and Human Capital Programme linking to the subsite of their activity in Kolno. The bottom of the page shows the outline of Poland localising the city on the map together with the address, telephone, fax and email details.

With the official arrival of the spring on the 21 March, Kolno's website has been updated. The layout of the menu and some items in the website has changed. The most striking change, however, has occurred to the decorative elements on the website<sup>7</sup>. The changes clearly represent the arrival of spring.

There are many more „signs of life' in the website of Kolno with comparison to Wells, the update of style in the new season being just one of them. Information such as today's date and name day, animation of images and videos available to watch further enhance the feeling of the website as an interactive medium rather than just a constant, basic content page.

In general, the website of Kolno appears anything but plain. There is a large amount of information presented in vivid colours, with decorative elements and animated banners and posters, all competing for the attention of the user. The website, at its length has been presented in the Appendix 1.

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<sup>7</sup> The snow has been replaced by daisies, sunflowers and butterflies spread in various locations throughout the website. Also, the picture of the sky is now intensive blue in colour and has been decorated with a colourful balloon. The banner showing the buildings has been updated and now shows them in full sunlight, surrounded by green trees and with no sighs of winter.



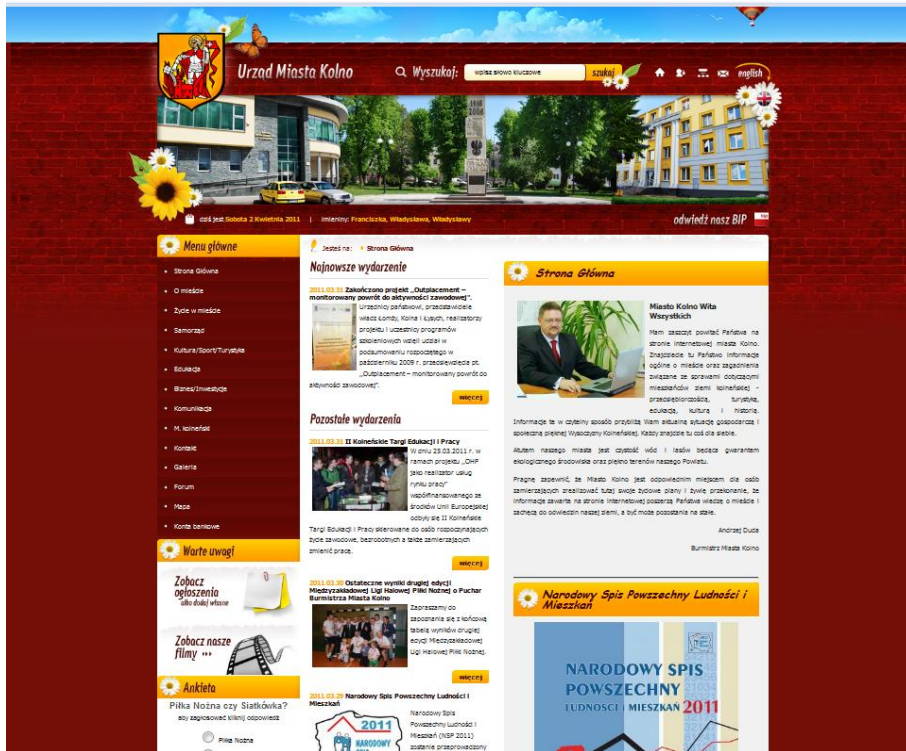


Figure 4 Kolno City Council website in the new, spring design

Legnica website <http://www.portal.legnica.eu/>

The first noticeable peculiarity of Legnica’s website is the domain name, which unlike Kolno (and Warszawa, as we shall see later) does not contain „um’ standing for *Urząd Miasta* (city council/hall), neither, and most importantly, it contains ‘pl’ (Poland). The domain name has „eu’ (for Europe/European Union) instead. MCDowell, Steinberg & Tomasello (2008, p.118) talking about internet domain names argue that:

*—thefosphere is managed through a continual process of renegotiation between states, nations, and communities of providers and users. This continual renegotiation occurs on many fronts, and one of these fronts revolves around how one names and represents one’s presence there.”*

The use of eu in the domain name implies that the city feels, or wants to market itself, as belonging more to Europe than to Poland.

The website itself is long and contains a large amount of information structured in a variety of ways on the home page. The background is light gray but the menus

contain plenty of colour. This at first appears to be colour coding, but later, the eye notices that this is not the case- the colours repeat themselves and are not subscribed to any particular theme<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, the website uses a lot yellow and blue combined together, which not only match the colours of the city's coat of arms, placed in the top left corner, but also the flags of the European Union present at the bottom of the page. The top of the website has been devoted to the page-wide banner representing the buildings of the city decorated with a marketing phrase: "*Legnica, z nią zawsze po drodze*" (translating as Legnica, *always with you*<sup>9</sup>) The phrase implies the easiness of access and willingness to visit the city. It also represents the focus on the city as opposed to its people- which was the case with Colchester's "*where people want to live, work and visit*". The website, has been updated with the arrival of spring, similarly to Kolno, focusing strongly on its structure and layout. The „wintery theme’ presented the buildings in greyscale, while the new, updated style shows different buildings, in full colour and with a new perspective. Another significant change is that the city emblem has been replaced with Legnica „brand logo’. This shows the increasing view of the urban areas as commodities- products designed to sell. Aurigi (2005) claims this commodification of public areas has been caused by a growing competition between cities.

The spring change in style has also brought in more icons (replacing text), a more advanced search engine, and expanded current English and German versions of the website to include another fifty languages, many from outside the EU. The expansion, provided by Google Translator, gives a quick fix to gaining and giving

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, the same shade of green has been placed on the menus/tabs of City Hall/ Jobs/ Secondary school admissions, Sports and Tourism.

<sup>9</sup> Literall translation: „Legnica, with her [the city] always on the way’

access to potential stakeholders from all over the world in the age of globalisation. Also, despite its most significant disadvantage– the translation being automated and thus inaccurate– it is an important step for a city which projects itself in connection to the European Union, which is famous for its focus on multilingualism.

The body of the home page has been divided into three columns, the middle one being the widest and divided into three tabs. The top of the right and middle column is dominated by a horizontal menu with information organised topically in ten icon decorated tabs (plus the home page tab). The menu on the left is also long and contains eleven main headings. Some of the headings appear expanded, some expand after clicking, while some do not expand at all. The level of the submenu is relatively deep making it difficult for the user to find information. The very bottom of the page repeats the main horizontal menu, but it is much less noticeable, lacks icons and also includes a change to one of the names. The information organised in subjects requires the users to click to find out more, as some of the naming could be confusing (for example two tabs: *Fees* and *Taxes/Fees*.) The bottom side of the left vertical menu contains, similarly to the right hand side, a number of posters of rather non-commercial nature: historical, cultural and sport events, city chronicles, etc.

On the whole, the website is colourful and link-rich. Its user is bombarded with information presented in a variety of menus, all of which have different forms, styles and subdivisions. The information contained in them has been arranged using the ambiguous scheme of content organisation methods that focuses on subjects or topics as considered important by the city council/ designer. There is no consistency in formatting and labelling in terms of the shape and colour of the

buttons and the structure of the menu. The form of the content is varied and includes pictures, graphics, articles, brochures/ posters, laws and regulations (both for download and displayed as part of the page), chronicle of the city opening as an e-book, and videos. The amount of information on the homepage and the variety of presentation methods might make it impossible for the user to concentrate on one item only which might brings the desire of exploring a few links at once. The website, at its length has been presented in the Appendix 2 and 3.



Figure 5 Legnica City Council webpage (spring version)- homepage

**Warszawa** <http://www.um.warszawa.pl/>

The information in the portal of Warszawa has been positioned in boxes laid out in two columns in the centre of the home page and two rows at the bottom of the page, as well as a horizontal menu at the top. Everything has been placed against the white background with some accents of colour red in the headings of each box and some accents of yellow on the tabs. Both of the colours appear to have been borrowed from the city emblem and the flag of Warsaw. The page is dominated

with a banner presenting the monumental historical buildings of the city. Warszawa's emblem is present in the top left hand corner together with the promotional phrase of the city —*Dieśiątki miejsc na poranne spacerzy*” (referring to the tens of places for the morning walks). The phrase conveys the information that Warszawa is an interesting city with plenty of nice sights– the focus, again, being on the city and not its people. The text of the website has been placed in various sized grey boxes, often with tabs dividing and structuring the information further. One of the boxes contains the latest information with a slide show window, similar to the ones of London and Colchester, but divided into two tabs with *events/what is happening* section and *for the business* section. This represents two types of information classification- topical and audience oriented. The column on the right has four separate boxes, in which some information has been shown with the use of icons and text, and some with the use of textual hyperlinks only displaying a lack of consistency. The lack of consistency is further evident is sections repeated on the homepage that– because of the same title used– appear to have the same purpose. Different information is, however, displayed each time the section is repeated, as if to highlight other points.<sup>10</sup> This is different to London website which, when showing the same menu repeats strictly the order and content of items. The bottom of the page contains a section called *Warszawa pamięta* (translated as *Warsaw remembers*) with historical facts including Second World War events and the link devoted to the life of the Polish Pope. When exploring the links in the website, opportunities to share information with others via the choice of social

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<sup>10</sup> See for example sections *Dla mieszkańców* (For citizens) and *Turystyka i wypoczynek* (Tourism and Leisure)

media, to adjust the display of the information or to have it read out aloud by the automated reader, have been provided throughout.

The website of Warszawa is relatively long and has been constructed with a heavy use of submenus and tabs. Although the home page of the portal has not been cluttered with posters or adverts it is still extremely full of hyperlinks. These make this homepage the most information-rich one out of the six described in this study (which will be further evidenced in the next section). The website is the new more interactive version „BETA’ and is possibly still subject to improvements as it lacks the site map. For the image of the whole website see Appendix 4.

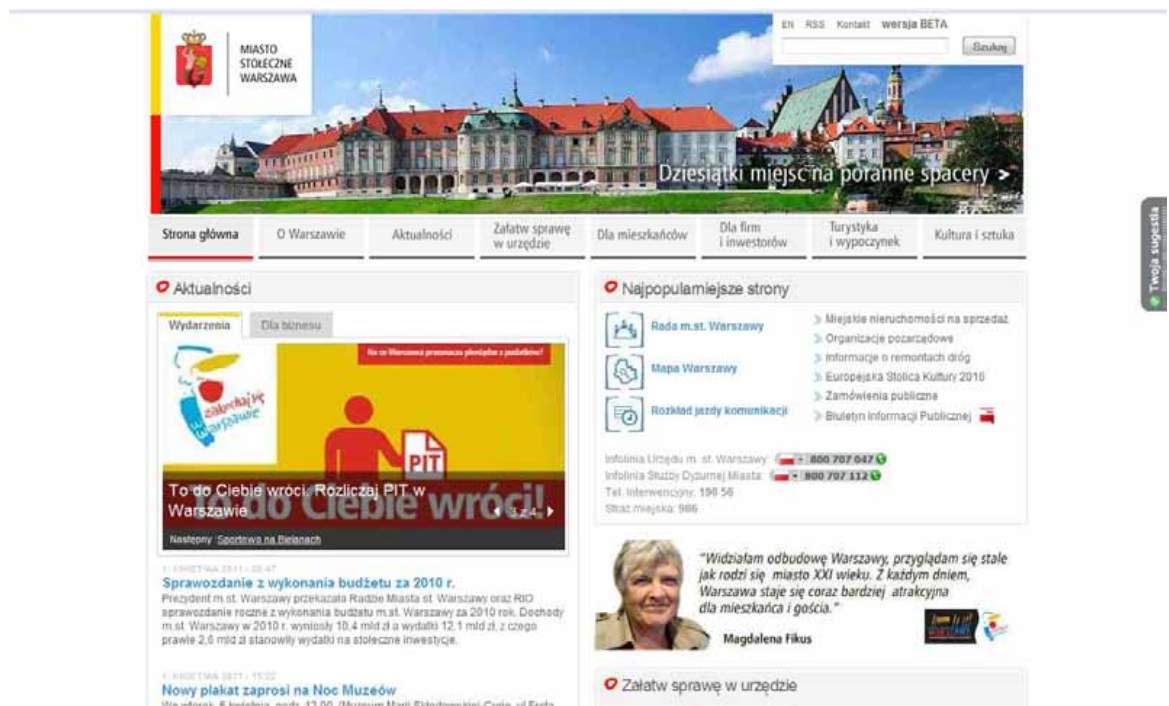


Figure 6 Warszawa City Council website- homepage

### *3.2.3 Conclusion – Differences in information architecture, information content and form among websites of Polish and British cities.*

It has once been said that a website very much resembles a plate of spaghetti with its ingredients so much mixed and intermingled together that it is impossible to understand the exact connections between them. This is not different with city portals I have described in terms of their structure and information architecture. The home pages of cities stayed in the limelight of this analysis. The home page usually is the first internet encounter of the user and the city online. It is typically the one which re-orientates the user in the labyrinth of the website and to which the user returns. The vastness of the levels beyond the start page and the amount of words it would take to describe them as well as the complexity of interconnections was also taken into consideration when choosing to focus on the start pages. Selected parts of the deeper levels of the portals will be given more consideration in the further parts of this chapter, especially when I will be drawing my attention to the images and accompanying textual context. For now, however, I will attempt to summarise the differences which have so far been discovered in the six websites.

The most striking difference when looking at the websites of Polish and British/English cities is the amount of information that has been incorporated in the home page. Numbers of words have been counted excluding the text embedded within labelling presented in image format. The results showing significant difference between Polish and English portals have been provided in the table below.

Wells	<b>439</b>	Kolno	<b>731</b>
Colchester	<b>297</b>	Legnica	<b>699</b>
London	<b>598</b>	Warszawa	<b>1608</b>

*Table 3 Word count of the homepages*

The figures indicate that the home pages of Polish city portals try to squeeze much more information into the page. The Polish pages are also more descriptive while the English ones are minimalistic and do not provide much introduction to or describe the content of information available in the link. As mentioned before, the count does not include the text embedded in some of the labels, neither does it count textual information contained in the advertising posters which have significant presence in the websites of Kolno and Legnica. The users of the Polish websites seem to be bombarded with information all competing for their attention with the help of animation, colour and variety in formatting. This could indicate a more polychronic nature of the Polish culture. Hall & Hall (1990, pp. 13-17) explain the meaning of polychronic time as “being involved in many things at once” and describe polychronic people as ones who are able to deal well with interruptions. It is obvious, that with the amount of information that is being presented to the users of Polish websites, they must be able to deal with all of them at once and seemingly appear not to mind this method of presenting information. Monochronic time, on the other hand, has been explained by Hall & Hall (1990) as “paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time”. This is visible in consistent and plain, transparent forms and structures on websites of English cities as well as lack of vivid eye catching posters which compete for the attention of the user. English websites appear less cluttered as the result of information structured in fewer headings and links. The users choose the broader topic they are interested



in and narrow it down to specific information starting with one of the few general headings in the menu. Polish websites present long, elaborate menus often repeated in the website with changes. Every time re-worked, such menus show different sides of the same story. Presenting different links with every repetition possibly works for the Polish users by giving them a larger chance of finding the information they want quicker, as opposed to patiently following the tread to the target.

In terms of information content, a difference in the attitude to history has been discovered in the six websites. Websites of the three Polish cities reflected high importance of history and tradition in the prominence given to the topic throughout the portals. For instance, Kolno has incorporated a 4.644 word uniform piece of text on the history of the city in the first option of the menu. In contrast, Wells has only included a small „curiosity piece’ citing some most important dates. Kolno provides separate sections on other history and tradition issues- e.g. one, dealing with locally famous medieval figure of *Jan z Kolna* and a list of historical buildings with their past described. The theme of tradition also shows on the home page of Wells with the picture of the city crier. There is, however, no further explanation of his role or the genesis of his function. Website of Legnica provides similar, past oriented, subsections dealing with history of the city, city chronicles, historical descriptions of buildings and a separate section relating to a specific historic battle. All of those have been placed in very prominent places of the website. Warszawa follows the same pattern, with a history section present in the *About Warsaw* menu. It provides detailed history of specific districts, buildings, monuments, street names, etc. Further, section entitled *Warsaw remembers* containing links to particular historical events granting them pages of the website.

Also, the legacy of John Pope II, „*the main claim to national pride*‘ (Szostkiewicz, 1992), is still strong in Poland which is visible in the section devoted especially to him in the portal of Warszawa and the Pope being one of „*the deserved ones*‘ for the city of Legnica.

The websites of Wells, Colchester and London do not give such prominence to the histories of respective cities or the issues of historical events. There are no separate sections dedicated to history placed in visible and easily accessible places; the matter of history appears much less important.

The strong focus on history indicates that Poland is a *past-oriented society*, as described by Kulckhohn & Strodtbeck (1960) and Hall & Hall (1990). Samovar, Porter & McDaniel (2010, p.212) explain:

*—Past-oriented cultures believe strongly in the significance of prior events. History, established religions, and traditions are extremely important to these cultures, so there is a strong belief that the past should be the guide for making decisions and determining truth”.*

Forms and structures on the websites of Polish cities appear more similar to each other than those of Wells, Colchester and London. The websites of Kolno, Legnica and Warszawa are all decorated with wide banners of monumental buildings. They take a considerable amount of space on the page and give the impression of buildings dominating all that is below them, or even governing the city. The formality and legitimacy of the websites of the three Polish cities has been further enhanced by the use of the coat of arms of each city in the left hand corner of the website. This is the case with both Kolno and Warszawa and has been the case with Legnica until the 21 March<sup>11</sup>. The legitimacy of websites has further been supported by the use of phrases „official portal of the city‘ and „official portal of the

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<sup>11</sup> With the arrival of spring, Legnica’s the coat of arms has been replaced by Legnica brand logo demonstrating the ever-growing commercialisation of cities.

capital of Poland' for Legnica and Warszawa in the title of the website in internet browsers. Kolno, Legnica and Warszawa also use graphical elements in the colour consistent with the official colours of the city i.e. the flag and/or coat of arms<sup>12</sup>. The display of well-known symbols including buildings of the city together with coats of arms, flags and regional colours serves a multiple purpose. First, it legitimises the city with the display of official signs in the abstractness of the internet. Secondly it helps in creation of the image of the city for marketing purposes. Finally, it helps the citizens to renegotiate local identity with the use of familiar symbols in the global reach of the internet.

The use of city emblems appears of a lesser importance to the English cities described. Although Wells uses the official coat of arms on every page of the website, it is placed in the background as a greyscale picture of low modality. Colchester prefers the use of brand logo, and the coat of arms can only be found in rather hidden sections of the website. London too, uses a logo, which transcends a standard brand logo with its modern, technological implication of a domain name. The fact that Legnica has changed its traditional coat of arms into a brand logo implies gradual commodification and globalisation to follow western patterns. It is possible that these traditional symbols within the area of marketing, are too official, regarded as non media-oriented and as unapproachable to a consumer as they evoke symbols associated with „remoteness' of power. Augiri (2005, p. 46) argues that the commodification of cities can affect the cyberspace more than the corresponding physical spaces due to the intrinsic promotional potential of the internet. The issue of cities becoming commercial products has nicely been summarised in the quotation provided by Unsworth (2008):

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<sup>12</sup> Kolno- yellow and red, Legnica- yellow and blue, Warszawa- golden and red

*—Competition among cities is like riding a bicycle: if you don't pedal, you'll fall off. However, globalization is making us increasingly uniform, so we must construct and promote our difference in order to continue existing.”<sup>13</sup>*

From the careful observation of the six available websites I can put forward that the following appears to be common.

Polish homepages tend to contain longer pieces of text and are more information- and link-rich. The websites' use of colour is consistent with the official colours of the city. Legitimacy is underlined by the use of word „official' or the visible use of the coat of arms. History is given much prominence throughout Polish portals.

The websites of the English cities described above organise information in more general headings thus resulting in their homepages appearing simpler, clearer and less cluttered. The information content does not include much on, or give prominence to the subject of the city history.

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<sup>13</sup> Mirón , Urban Land Institue

### **3.3 Pictures, graphics, multimedia and text as means of representation of culture on the website**

Contemporary culture is becoming increasingly reliant on visual communication. This is particularly the case with the world wide web which developed rapidly from read-only, static HTML websites of Web 1.0 through Web 2.0 centred around user communities' contributions and sharing of content, to Web 3.0 which is employing even more sophisticated features.

Forms of visual communication include and are not limited to graphics, images, animation, videos, sign and symbols. They have the capacity to communicate messages instantly, but they are fixed to the cultural conventions of their environment. (Bamford, 2003)

In this part of the chapter, I will look at forms of visual communication used in the websites of Polish and English cities in terms of cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede and House. The context that the images have been presented within, will be taken into consideration by analysing pieces of text accompanying the pictures as well as selected pieces of text present elsewhere in the websites.

### 3.3.1 Cultural representations of Uncertainty Avoidance

As described in Chapter Two of this work, the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) has been defined differently by Hofstede and by the GLOBE researchers. Whereas Hofstede defines UA as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations”, House et al define it as “The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events”. Considering Polish society, I agree with Hofstede’s classification of Poland as a high UA society, as a culture which feels stressed in uncertain situations. With its centuries’ long history of invasions and occupations the desire for stability and firm grounding in Poland is understandable. House’s scores for this dimension reveal Poland as a low uncertainty avoidance culture, which he understands as one, which does not rely on norms, rules and procedures to lessen uncertainty. If one considers law as kind of „social norms, rules, and procedures’, I also agree with the findings that Poles do not rely on those to alleviate insecurity. Morzol and Ogórek (1992, p.62) describe law in Poland during the communist times:

*—Laws were drawn ambiguously and imprecisely of set purpose—the better to apply arbitrarily. One could not rigorously ascertain whether someone was guilty of a given offense or whether a given act was criminal. The whole system was set up so as to make it possible that anyone subject to the system could be convicted or acquitted of one charge or another, at the complete discretion of state power. As a popular saying went: —Give me the person, and I’ll find the law [that he broke].”*

Although Poland has been free from communism for over twenty years now, its echo is present, not only in people’s mentality, but also still in the law itself. Despite numerous reviews, Polish law is still accused of being chaotic and untrustworthy (Lis, 2008). Wedel (2001) confirms the ambiguous nature of Polish

law writing that experiences of law and morality in Poland do not stem from fixed notions of justice. The case of Poland underlines the problem of disparity in the two attitudes to the meaning of the term. Venaik & Brewer (2010) propose a compromising, two component model of Uncertainty Avoidance with the usage of specific domains that they represent, i.e. UA-stress (Hofstede) and UA-rule orientation (one for practices and one for aspirations; House).

Singh, Zhao & Hu (2005) argue that the internet as a medium is associated with a certain degree of uncertainty. It is in a state of constant flux and is characterised by interactivity and accessibility for user input which makes it unpredictable and unstable. City council websites, however, are likely to be characterised by larger predictability than commercial portals due to their need of creating trust and rapport with a wide range of citizens. Furthermore, they are official, government bodies responsible for content of webpages they are authoring.

A number of researchers have identified website features referring to uncertainty avoidance. They are, however, concerned with Hofstede's interpretation of the term. Singh and Matsuo (2004) and Singh, Zhao & Hu (2005) believe guided navigation, emphasis on history/tradition and the use of local terminology are characteristic of high UA in websites. Marcus and Gould (2000) claim high UA cultures would emphasize simplicity, restricted amounts of data and navigation preventing the user from getting lost. Callahan (2006) lists limited scrolling for High UA and long scrolling for Low UA. Karacay-Aydin, Akben-Selcuk, Aydin-Altinoklar (2010) talk about presence of site maps, search tools and reference to history in building trustworthy image in High UA cultures, while Singh (2002) adds such elements as secure payment signs and systems. House's understanding of Uncertainty Avoidance has not been considered by the researchers. I propose that

the presence of norms, rules, and procedures in the website would be the most obvious depiction of this value.

I will now look at the websites and explore them from the point of view of the Uncertainty Avoidance.

The website of Wells with no guided navigation, no site map and no search engine implies a low uncertainty avoidance culture. On the other hand it is simple and restricted in information implying the opposite. Furthermore, mayor's and councillors' private contact details give a feel of small-town familiarity. Tradition is depicted by the picture of a well-known to the citizens figure of the City Crier. Also, the homepage gives the link to Freedom of Information Act (2000) which instantly reminds of reliance on norms and rules.

Colchester provides variety of ways in which the users can find required information and appears clear and straightforward. It shows current position through breadcrumb trails, provides a search engine, a site map, list of shortcuts and the emergency list, registration and login opportunities, all there to help the user navigate the website. The website contains the online payment option. Talking about security it assures the visitors it is *„independently and rigorously security assessed‘*, and *„certified by Visa and MasterCard as a Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) Level 1 payment processor‘*. The homepage contains links to Privacy Policy, Disclaimer/Copyright, Fraud Policy and Terms of Use.

The website of London appears simple, yet contains plenty of information. Although navigation does not provide breadcrumb trails, it highlights the user's position on the menu. The bottom menu stays with the users wherever they are in the website allowing them to come back to a broader topic. It also contains a site



map and an extensive search tool, as well as registration/login option and does not require long scrolling. Rules and regulations present on the homepage include Terms and Conditions, Privacy Policy and a section on Freedom of Information.

Extensive navigational aids available and the large amount of rules (such as terms of usage of the portal) imply high UA culture in the websites of Colchester and London.

The websites of Kolno, Legnica and Warszawa are long and rich in information, some of which presented in a form of posters or animated banners. This variety of forms and structures as well as large amount of links indicates low UA. On the other hand, extensive navigational help has been provided throughout all three Polish websites (except for a site map in Warszawa).

Kolno further gives an indication of today's date and the name day to help users find themselves in the temporal space, thus an indicator of high UA. It provides a search engine and navigational buttons as well as breadcrumb trails. One of the main heading of the homepage contains Terms and Conditions of usage of the portal, Regulations regarding publication of information on the website and Regulations on Co-operation with the portal. Special sections have also been devoted to history indicating high UA in all three portals.

### ***3.3.1.1 Uncertainty Avoidance summarised***

As mentioned before, the internet, as a medium of communication contains a degree of uncertainty. City councils will try to minimise this uncertainty whilst seeking to project a trustworthy image of themselves on their websites. The websites of Colchester and London with extensive navigational features and limited, concise information, as well as a clear display of usage terms and

conditions, suggest high uncertainty avoidance. The website of Wells sends both signals. This is also the case with all Polish portals which display enormous variety in forms and formatting (a sign of low uncertainty avoidance) with strong guided navigation (a sign of high uncertainty avoidance).

The degrees to which Polish and English cultures vary within the dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance has been impossible to determine at this stage. Although websites of Polish cities, in particular of Kolno and Legnica, appear cluttering the homepage with information, they employ navigational aids such as breadcrumb trails and *back/ up* buttons. The websites of Colchester and London limits the information given in the homepage and provide navigational aids in the form of highlighting the relevant menu. It is difficult to verify which of these strategies-limiting the information or vast amounts of it but with explicit navigational aids indicated higher levels of Uncertainty Avoidance.

House's understanding of Uncertainty Avoidance is mostly concerned with reliance on rules. The presence of these is visible in the homepages of all portals. Additionally, various forms of acts, policies, regulations, procedures, protocols, decisions, disclaimers, law statutes, directives and others have been found throughout all studied websites. This is not a surprise, as city councils play an important part in legislative system, author such publications and post them on the websites for extended accessibility. Dependence on rules, therefore, is difficult, if not impossible to be measured on the websites of cities.

### **3.3.2 Cultural representations of power and authority**

One of the dimensions in which Polish and British cultures vary is *power distance*. Hofstede (2001, p. 98) defines *power distance (PDI)* as: “The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”.

Hofstede further provides a *PDI societal norm table*, in which he compares low and high power distance. He claims that nations with high PDI are characterised by such norms as the following: *power holders are entitled to privileges and should try to look as powerful as possible; superiors consider subordinates as being of a different kind (and vice versa); a few should be independent, most should be dependent; older people are respected and feared.*

Low PDI societal norms, in turn, include: *powerful people should try to look less powerful than they are; the use of power should be legitimate and is subject to the judgement between good and evil; subordinates and superiors are people like me; older people are neither respected nor feared.*

Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede and Dienes (2002), claim that although Poland displays the lowest power distance out of Slovakia, Hungary and Czech Republic, it is still relatively large if compared with Western European countries. The authors refer to Jankowicz (1994) who talks about *„idiosyncratic stance towards authority‘* in Poland: *„outward respect for authority (or even servility) is important, but need not necessarily be accompanied by any real commitment from the side of the subordinate‘*. This, they argue, can be explained by historical reasons such as strong and prolonged feudal social structure:

*—Near the bottom, the local nobility was able to retain near absolute control over their serfs well into the eighteenth century. At the top, however, decision-making took place on*

*the basis of equality, culminating in the practice, from 1652 onwards, of the national parliament to take decisions unanimously.”*

Żakowska (2006) writes:

*—The Poles still have a tendency towards strong social hierarchy and the division into the elite and the masses, despite the fact that the representatives of the masses are able to negate the value and universality of elite authorities, and that the elite is, in turn, at times wooing the masses”.<sup>14</sup>*

In his research, Hofstede established large cultural differences in terms of power distance between Poland and Great Britain calculating the indices at a high 68 for Poland and a lower 35 for the UK.

House et al. (2007), who define *power distance* as: “The extent to which power in a society is unequally shared” (p.815) or “The degree to which members of a society expect power to be distributed equally” (p. 368), believe that Polish and English cultures are fairly similar with regards to the attitude to power. The research which measured both societal norms (reflecting as *things are*) and societal values (reflecting as *things should be*) indicated similar scores for both countries. England’s power distance norm was measured high at 5.15 and 5.1 for Poland. Power distance value, on the other hand, indicated a very low 2.8 for England and 3.1 for Poland. These scores are reflected in the country rankings (presented in the earlier chapter) with Poland on 40<sup>th</sup> and England on the 36<sup>th</sup> place, reflecting slightly different, yet overall fairly low places of both societies on the power distance scale.

Chokar, Brodbeck, and House (2007) explain that the power distance in England has declined gradually since the World War II. This was caused by the collapse of

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<sup>14</sup> Author’s own translation. The original reads: „Polacy wciąż przejawiają tendencję ku dość silnej hierarchizacji społecznej, ku podziałowi na elitę oraz „masy”, niezależnie od faktu, że przedstawiciele „mas” potrafią negować wartość oraz uniwersalność elitarnych autorytetów, elita zaś czasami usiłuje przypochlebić się „masom”.”

the overseas colonies, the royal family and landed gentry losing their influence and finally by the politics of Ms Thatcher, who, they write, aimed at directing culture from dependency to the one of an individual freedom and responsibility.

Features indicating cultural differences in the websites have been identified by a number of researchers (Singh, Zhao & Hu (2003), Marcus & Gould (2000), Baack & Singh (2007), Singh & Matsuo (2004), Callahan (2006), Pan & Xu (2009), Ahmed, Mouratidis & Preston (2008), Kim, Coyle & Gould (2009), Karacay-Aydin, Akben-Selcuk, Aydin-Altinoklar (2010) and others).

Marcus & Gould (2000) suggest that high power distance, as defined by Hofstede, will influence user-interface and web design with highly structured access to information, emphasis on social and moral order (e.g. nationalism/ religion) and frequent use of its symbols. Strong focus on authority and official logos/stamps/certifications with prominence given to leaders (as opposed to the common people) will also indicate high power distance culture in the world wide web environment. Marcus & Gould's indicators of low power distance include the opposite i.e. shallow hierarchies, infrequent use of social/moral order symbols, focus on citizens/customers rather than people in authority. Callahan (2006) cites the research of Ackerman (2002) who identified the photographs of leaders, monuments and monumental buildings as the indicators of large power distance. Low level of this dimension would in turn, according to Ackerman, show in images of both genders and in images of public spaces and everyday activities. Ahmed, Mouratidis and Preston (2008) claim the following features characterise a website from a large power distance culture: „Authority's role, pictures of important people in the company, and organisational charts are enforced as images or official certification logos.' Also, special titles are displayed so that people can be

addressed appropriately and shown respect, authority figures are the main features of the websites and the average citizens are displayed less prominently. Low power distance could also be depicted by developing the feel of a close relationship with the users and by avoiding signs of hierarchy.

I will now turn to the city council websites to investigate whether the portrayal of power and authority in the portals (in particular the portrayal of city mayors and councillors) reflects cultural variations in power distance as described by Hofstede and/or House. I will do this by examining selected pictures and accompanying text from the point of view of power distance presence in the meanings which the pictures communicate through the objects and symbols depicted therein.

An in-depth analysis of the websites of Wells, Colchester and London indicates that power and authority have been depicted in a rather diminishing way throughout the English portals. Hofstede (2001, p. 97) writes: "In low-PDI countries, power is something of which the power holders are almost ashamed and that they will try to underplay." This is clearly evident in the websites of the three English cities.

The website of the city of Wells presents a modest picture of the mayor and the councillors. The portal shows two small, passport-style photographs of „the leader’. One of the pictures has been placed on the page with *mayor’s diary* where people are able to find out what the mayor is doing in the near future. The transparency of mayor’s plans shows that the power holder is accountable to the public and is subject to the judgement of people (between good and evil) as described by Hofstede’s (2001) societal norms for low power distance. The other picture has been posted together with other councillors’ in the *council members section*. The picture, apart from a simple description *Cllr. Tony Robbins Mayor of Wells*, is

indistinguishable in status from the other indicating shallow hierarchy of power. Furthermore, all pictures are accompanied by similar information i.e. postal addresses, telephone, mobile numbers and email addresses of the councillors. The postal and email addresses appear to be private ones.<sup>15</sup> This indicates a very small distance between the power holders and the citizens– the mayor and the councillors project themselves as indistinguishable from „normal’ residents of the town and are available to them not only in public, but also in private domain.



*Figure 7 Cllr. Tony Robbins Mayor of Wells*

A similar list of councillors has been presented in the *Council and Democracy* section of Colchester portal. The councillors’ pictures have been included next to their postal addresses, telephone numbers and official city council email addresses. The pictures of councillors are considerably small and show councillors in not extremely formal, but smart clothing (e.g. no tie in case of some men). The councillors look friendly and approachable thanks to broad smiles on their faces. People higher in status on the list of councillors are only identifiable by the note next to their surnames (e.g. Chuah, Helen (Deputy Mayor)). This, again, represents a shallow hierarchy and an attempt to appear less powerful with the

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<sup>15</sup> The mayor’s address is rather informal: (theeasywaytoeat@aol.com) and the address of a councillor indicates possible family business (danny@unwinsfunerals.co.uk).

superiors and the subordinates presented in the same section, thus being „of one kind’. The section provides options to browse councillors by alphabetical order, political party or by location. This user-friendly feature clearly focuses on the citizen and resembles a customer choosing the most suitable option to them from an online service/product catalogue.



*Figure 8 Some of the Colchester councillors and the two indistinguishable mayors*

People belonging to the *Council Management Team* and *Heads of Services* have slightly larger pictures which are accompanied by lists of responsibilities. These have been provided in the context of the question *“Who do I contact about what, and how?”*. Presenting this in a form of a question, rather than a statement such as for instance *“Find out about members’ responsibilities”*, is less authoritative. It shows orientation towards helping the user by predicting the questions which they might pose whilst browsing the website.



*Figure 9 Some members of the Council Management Team*

The mayor of Colchester has mostly been shown in ceremonial circumstances. One of the pictures presents her during the *„ceremony of the installation of a new*



*Mayor*. The mayor, shown during the official swearing, is wearing mayoral robes with the traditional hat, and the man that accompanies her is wearing civic clothing and a traditional wig. The picture, although taken during the most important ceremony for the mayor, is not very large in resolution or size, thus does not provide the opportunity to see the mayor clearly. The text accompanying the picture is aimed at the website users/ citizens and is an explanation of what usually happens during the ceremony. The website of Warszawa also presents the installation of the new mayor. The portal, however, appears to present the mayor and the authorities in the limelight, providing the user with an extensive collection of the mayor's photographs from this event. Colchester's attitude, on the other hand, shows the citizens in the centre of attention by providing the explanation for the use of the people and only few, low quality pictures of the mayor. The link to *Mayor of Colchester 2010-2011* section shows pictures of the mayor and the deputy mayor in the mayoral robes accompanied by Mayor's Escorts. The purpose of this page is to present the mayor to the public, which it does by a descriptive note about the mayor (and a similar one for the deputy mayor):

*—Soia Lewis was born in Colchester and spent her childhood at Elmstead Market where her parents farmed and was mainly educated at Malvern, Worcestershire and concluded her school days at Endsleigh School, Lexden. She started work on a dairy farm later joining her brothers to work alongside them on the family farm.”*

The text depicts events which could have taken place in the everyday life of an average person and does not attempt to depict status. This underlines the fact that the mayor is *of the same* and not of *superior* kind. A stark contrast to this is the biographical note of the mayor of Warszawa which starts with:

*—Anna Gronkiewicz-Waltz was born on 4 November 1952 in Warsaw. In 1975 she has graduated in Law at University of Warsaw (UW). In the same year she started her research*

*work at UW. In 1981 she defended her PhD entitled (...) and received the PhD Title in Law.”<sup>16</sup>*

This indicates clearly that the person described is not *an everyman*. The description raises the status above the average, common people.<sup>17</sup>



*Figure 10 Representations of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Colchester*

The mayor and the deputy mayor of Colchester have been presented in very formal, ceremonial situations in their capacity as the representatives of city traditions. The amount of pictures of the mayors is rather small (in comparison to Polish websites) and their resolution is not very large. There are no other pictures which focus directly on the mayors' face or show them zoomed in closely. This implies that, despite the extremely official appearance of the mayors, their role is merely to depict tradition resembling, in a much smaller scale, though, the mostly-representative function of the British monarchy.

The presentation of power and authority in the website of London has largely been incorporated into the *Who runs London* menu. The menu has six tabs (presented in order): *Londoners*, *Greater London Authority (GLA)*, *Mayor of London*, *London Assembly*, *London Boroughs* and *Central Government*. The order of the items seems to reflect the importance of power holders which is reinforced in the first tab

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<sup>16</sup> Author's own translation, the original reads: Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz urodziła się 4 listopada 1952 r. w Warszawie. W 1975 r. ukończyła studia prawnicze na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim. W tym samym roku podjęła pracę jako pracownik naukowy UW. W 1981 r. obroniła pracę doktorską pt.: „Rola ministra przemysłowego w zarządzaniu gospodarką państwową” i uzyskała tytuł doktora nauk prawnych.

<sup>17</sup> Similar style has been maintained in case of Legnica's mayor.

of the menu which reads: —~~A~~bove all, it's Londoners who run London.” It presents a picture showing a wide intersection of London's society cycling along a street. Most of them wear a helmet and/or a high-visibility vest indicating people who are cautious and care about themselves and those they are responsible for. Presentation of Londoners as the main power holders in the city exhibits a particularly low power distance and strong focus on citizens and not authorities.



Figure 11 Londoners

The GLA tab explains the GLA as „a strategic authority with a London-wide role to design a better future for the capital’. The description further uses such verbs and phrases as: support’, help’, deliver strategies’, represent the interests of Londoners’. This represents the servitude of the authority to the people, and not the other way round implying a small distance. The image which has been presented next to the text has been reproduced below. The foreground, which takes about two thirds of the picture's size is taken by lanes and alleys filled with people strolling along River Thames and relaxing on the grass. The building of London City Hall is shown in the background. This reflects the foreground

importance of people in the functioning of the city as represented by the city council website. The authorities thus show the citizens and not themselves in the limelight. Furthermore, as described by Callahan (2006) who cites Ackerman (2002) images of public spaces and activities (Londoners on bikes) are the indicators of lower PDI.



*Figure 12 Greater London Authority*

The picture shown in the *London Assembly* tab shows a horseshoe shaped table with 24 members of the Assembly sitting around it and a small central table occupied by the mayor. He appears to be in the centre of attention, being the chair of the meeting and, at the same time, a person under a close scrutiny of others. This includes both the Assembly members, and the general public that is visible to the right and especially to the bottom, in the foreground of the picture. This creates the impression that the camera holder/ viewer is present at the assembly meeting and is one of the observers of the mayor's actions. This image is accompanied by a description of Assembly's function containing the following phrases: „examine the Mayor's actions', „holding the Mayor to account', „investigate matters that are



important to London', „representing the interests of Londoners'. Low power distance societies are characterised by the power holders being subject to judgement and scrutiny by the subordinates- power needs more legitimation than in societies with high PDI (Hofstede, 2001).



*Figure 13 London Assembly*

The theme of the common man being above the power holders could also be noticeable in the *London Boroughs* and *Central Government* tabs which show the aerial pictures of London extending to the horizon. The perspective here places the man above the buildings representing power (Houses of Parliament)- the man also on the top of the large magnificent city as its proud creator.



*Figure 14 Aerial picture of London*

*The Mayor of London* tab includes the explanation of Mayor's responsibility using the following phrases: „sets the vision for how to make London an even greater city and develops strategies and policies', „encourages', „backs action to realise that vision', „holds the executive power'. The picture accompanying this description shows a cast of a bear's head on the left and the mayor on the right. The bear appears dangerous with its mouth open showing sharp teeth as if ready to attack. The mayor is a bit lower, leaning his arm relaxed just below the bear's face and looking the beastly animal straight into its mouth with an amused, cheeky expression. The mayor wears a shirt and a tie together with an unbuttoned suit jacket making him look professional and smart but not too stiff or unapproachable. His gestures and face expressions seem to convey the message of not being afraid to look the beast in the eye, being open to new challenges, fearless and able to deal with problems with self-control and a down to earth approach.



*Figure 15 Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London*

The Mayor of London as the holder of executive power shows a lot of presence on the website in the form of Mayoral Decisions Listings, images and videos. The

mayor is presented close, or even among the people. The pictures below show the mayor as one of the members of the community. In the *Team London* picture all people wearing a suit have been placed in the centre of this small crowd representing central position of the power holders. Nevertheless, the perspective of the picture, shot from the top enables every member of the team to be seen as equal. They are all very close to one another, waving at the camera and smiling. The picture indicates that every person, including the mayor and other officials are the equal members of the *Team London* volunteer group.



*Figure 16 Team London*

Volunteering appears to be an important issue in the policies of London's authorities. The authorities, however, try to lead by example and wish to represent themselves as equal to the members of the community. In the pictures below, the mayor is shown working with the community. While the pictures on the left appear to be slightly artificial and possibly made for the camera (due to the mayor wearing a suit), the pictures on the right show him hard at work, undistinguishable from the common people.



Figure 17 Mayor of London as an example to follow for the public

The links to videos have been placed in various sections of the websites. They are often short documentaries on current matters shown to the viewers with the mayor as the news reporter. He operates clear, relatively colloquial language (often starting the recording with *—Hfolks, we’re here in...*). Kang and Mastin (2008) claim that countries with low power distance display more of a propensity to feature casual narratives with the purpose of developing a more personal relationship with the website visitors. In the census video, the mayor talks about the importance of filling in the census which is *coming down the tracks on May 26<sup>th</sup>*. He says: *—Please take a tiny amount of time over a cuppa tea and a biscuit, fill that form, whack it in (...)*. The language makes him look more similar to the average person in London than to a sophisticated stiff-upper-lip aristocrat. Furthermore, he relates to the common, daily ritual of drinking tea. The camera used to shot videos throughout the website is quite often hand held creating a



shaky, home-video style image. This creates the feel of informality and further lowers the distance between the mayor and the viewer.

*Meet the mayor* section reads: *—The Mayor is often spotted on his bike riding around London. If you would like to meet him when he is standing still in one place there are a number of Mayoral events throughout the year open to the public.*” This implies that although the mayor is busy, people can talk to him face-to-face. The fact that he rides a bike means to the public he is just like any other person. Hofstede (2001, p. 97) writes that leaders may „enhance their informal status by renouncing formal symbols’ and provides examples of low PDI countries such as Austria and Netherlands where the prime ministers took a „street car to work’ and went on holiday to a campsite in a motor home.

The website of London shows the representative of executive power extremely close to the community and identifying himself strongly with Londoners. The representation of such low space between the mayor and the Londoners might be somewhat an exception. Nevertheless, the authorities of Wells and Colchester projected a clear attempt to lower the distance by not displaying high hierarchies and behaving in accordance to the low PDI rule of „the subordinates and the superiors are people like me’. In general, they have rarely shown overt signs of power differences among people. Where the demonstration of status was inevitable, attempts to lower the power and transparency were displayed (for instance by publishing salary information and expenses of Colchester and London’s officials, an insight into the mayor of Wells diary). In conclusion, the three English websites described exhibit the characteristics of low power distance culture as agreed by both Hofstede and House et al.

In comparison, the websites of the three Polish cities maintain a higher power context. The first noticeable thing on the website of Kolno is the picture of the mayor together with his message placed in the central part of the homepage.

The mayor is shown sitting at his desk in front of the notebook. He is smartly dressed wearing a suit, a white shirt and a dark red tie (which are the national colours of Poland). The presence of the notebook and documents on the desk are the symbols of knowledge and show his status. They also create an artificial barrier between the observer and the person in the picture. Although he is looking into the camera his body seems to be directed at the computer not focusing entirely on the addressee of the photograph. He does not smile, hence creates a gap between the audience. The mayor has been shown in his office, that is, in all his power context.



*Figure 18 Andrzej Duda, the mayor of Kolno welcomes users to the website*

The message to the visitors of the portal has been written in a formal, courteous language and includes the following:

*—have the pleasure to welcome you, Ladies and Gentlemen to the website of Kolno.(...) I wish to assure you that the City of Kolno is the right place for people wishing to realise their plans here, and I strongly believe that the information included in this website will broaden your knowledge of the*

*city and will encourage you to visit our soil and possibly stay here forever.”<sup>18</sup>*

This welcoming message presented by the most important person in the city, speaks to these users of the website who are potential investors and apart from everyone will find something for themselves<sup>19</sup> ignores the „regular’ citizens.

The section devoted to the mayor uses the same picture and provides his city council details including the room number, fax, telephone and email address. The information on his availability to the citizens uses Polish expression przyjmowanie interesantów<sup>19</sup>. This instantly brings the negative connotations of bureaucracy by implying „receiving people who are interested in sorting out some business in the city council’ as opposed to „receiving people in order to help them out, or offer them services’<sup>19</sup> thus focusing on the status holders and not on serving the community. The section also provides a short CV of the mayor including details of his education, employment and a history of community involvement as well as awards received. The education of the mayor is further stressed by the use of *inż.* title (*engineer/bachelor of science equivalent degree*) in front of his name. Ahmed, Mouratidis and Preston (2008), and Singh and Baack (2007) claim that the use of special titles allows effective addressing as well as a display of appropriate respect in high power distance countries. The website of Warszawa and Legnica also feature mayors’ CVs which start with and strongly focus on lists of academic achievements and titles received. Additionally, Legica’s webpage showing the councillors, lists their details in order of surname, first name, position held,

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<sup>18</sup> Author’s own translation, the original reads:” Mam zaszczyt powitać Państwa na stronie internetowej miasta Kolno. (...) Pragnę zapewnić, że Miasto Kolno jest odpowiednim miejscem dla osób zamierzających zrealizować tutaj swoje życiowe plany i żywią przekonanie, że informacje zawarte na stronie internetowej poszerzą Państwa wiedzę o mieście i zachęcą do odwiedzin naszej ziemi, a być może pozostania na stałe”.

<sup>19</sup> *Interesant* has been defined by the Polish Language Dictionary as „a person arriving at an office in order to sort out some matters.

educational background, function and commissions. The usage of surname first gives the impression of extreme officialism increasing the distance, and the inclusion of educational background legitimises power holding status.

In contrast, the websites of Wells and Colchester do not mention specific educational titles.

The official function of the mayor and the councillors in the website of Kolno seems to be stressed in the pictures showing them at work. The citizens are showered with images which show people in authority in the context where their power is clearly in effect, for example in the assembly room with a large Polish national emblem in the centre (see Appendix 5). The environment in which the president is shown is defined by formality; the mayor is rarely shown interacting with the common people. His functions with regards to the community are limited to that of person opening the most important events in the town and presenting awards during those events. These have been shown in the images below.





*Figure 19 The mayor's functions*

The overall tone of officialism in the representation of power in the website of Kolno, is repeated in the portal of Legnica. The mayor of Legnica, as the representative of authorities has been assigned a separate website.<sup>20</sup> Kept in the colours of Legnica's coat of arms, it shows a large image of the mayor laid on top of the slide show window. The top left hand corner has been devoted to the mayor's name, serving a function of a logo to the website. The picture of the mayor shows him wearing a suit and a white shirt with a dark red tie (as in the case of mayor of Kolno evoking the Polish national colours). The images behind him show various sites of the city including important buildings and new built motorways (implying movement forward, new investments, mobility). Here, the mayor, and not the citizen is shown above the city.

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<sup>20</sup> [www.prezydent.legnica.eu](http://www.prezydent.legnica.eu).



Figure 20 The mayor of Legnica on his own website

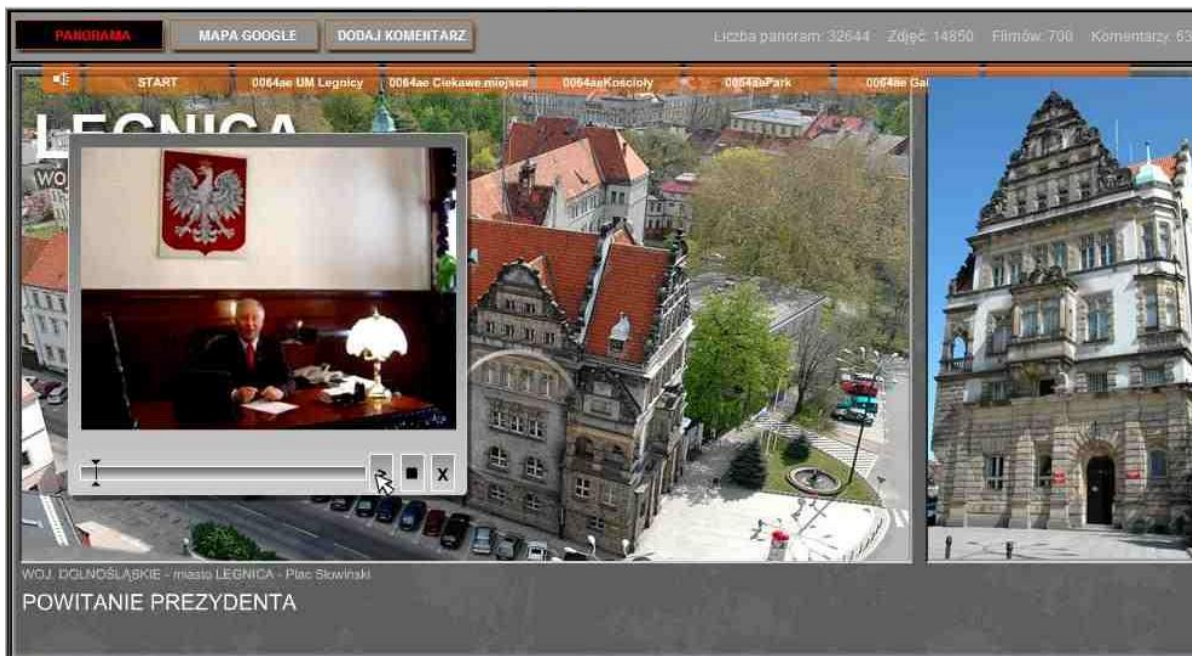
The main page of the mayor's website shows a welcoming message to the users. The projection of authority figures in the main features of the communication media are, according to Marcus & Gould (2000), Callahan (2006) and Ahmed, Mouratidis and Preston (2008) clear indicators of high power distance. In his message, the mayor writes about the fact that enjoys every form of contact, discussion and exchange of opinions with people. There are indeed options to contact the mayor using the form on the website, postal address provided or by contacting him on facebook or *nasza klasa*, which is a Polish social networking website. Although the mayor provides a variety of contact opportunities for the citizens through the social networking sites, he stays official and does not show closeness to the citizens. The picture below depicts the distance with the official handshake. The mayor's function as an important person opening events in the town has been shown in the second picture. This function is also reinforced in the section on how to get the Mayor's Patronage over cultural events. The patronising role of the mayor is showing his superior role to the citizens and their matters.





*Figure 21 The mayor of Legnica meeting the residents and during functions*

The website of Legnica provides the opportunity to see the city through a virtual walk. By using the mouse pointer, the user is able to move around the majestic buildings of the city, and even enter some of them. The walk starts with a video message from Legnica's mayor. He is shown in formal attire behind his large desk in his office guarded by the Polish national emblem as a legitimising symbol of nation.



*Figure 22 Start of the virtual walk of Legnica*

The exploration of the city council building leads the users to various rooms. The office of the deputy mayor shows her at work in power symbolising context, not troubled by the virtual presence of the user. A larger picture of the higher in

hierarchy mayor is present on the right and the room is decorated by the symbol of Poland.

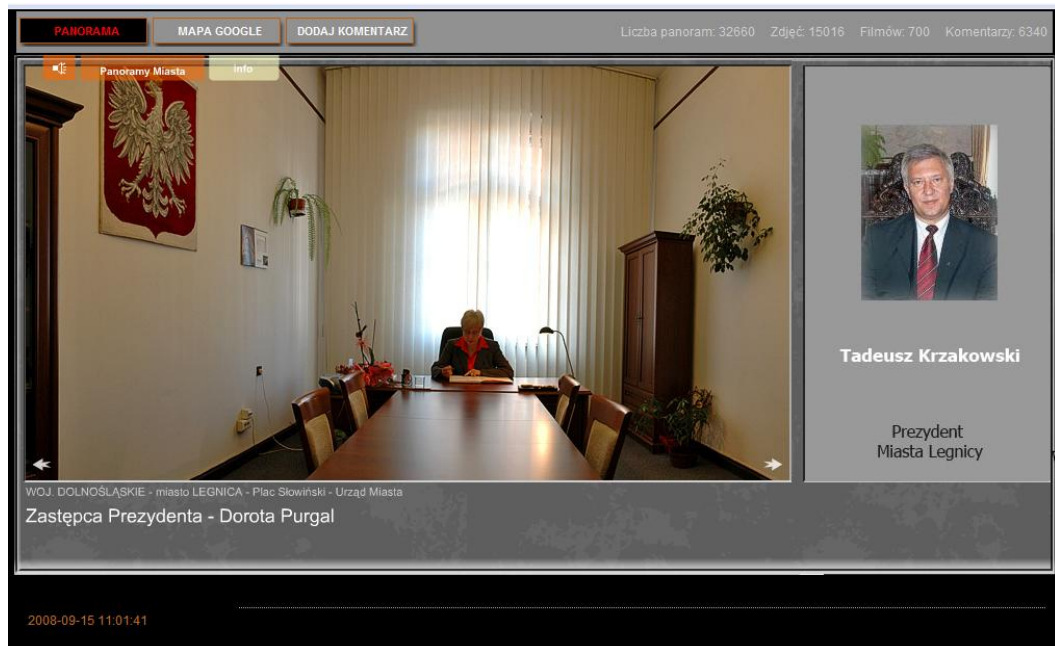


Figure 23 Virtual walk: the deputy mayor of Legnica

Further exploration of the building leads the users back to the mayor's office where the visitors have a 360-degree-view of the mayor's luxury items and furniture. According to Hofstede (2001) power holders in high power distance cultures are entitled to privileges and try to look as powerful as possible. Both Hofstede and House agree that high power distance societies accept unequal distribution of power, therefore a display of luxuries is not likely to cause social objection. The councillors as well as the mayor have been presented in a way which clearly shows their status. The two pictures below present the most important officials in the centre of the picture wearing mayoral chains, the symbols of power. The backgrounds of the pictures are the city flag and the city hall. The building as the symbol of power has also been emphasised, together with the mayor and the deputy mayor in a separate portrait one of the images.





Figure 24 Councillors and mayor of Legnica



Figure 25 Prominent positions of the mayor, the deputy mayor and the city hall as symbols of power

High power distance is also evident in the website of Warszawa. The section on city authorities (*Władze Miasta*) has been divided into flyout menus containing specific organs responsible for the running of Warsaw. The list starting with the mayor continues: deputy mayors, the secretary, the treasurer, the city council, the offices of the city council. The information has been structured in a deep hierarchy in order of power status and importance. Unlike London's website, Warsaw does

not list any role of citizens in the power sharing, not to mention showing them in the primary position with a Polish version of the phrase: “Above all, it’s Varsovians who run Warsaw”. Menu labelling in London’s portal “Who runs London?” is also much less authoritative as a question than statement “City authorities”. The mayor of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz has been presented in a portrait, wearing smart clothes with a hint of smile. She has been shown with official city emblem in the background symbolising local identity and legitimising her position.



*Figure 26 Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, the mayor of Warszawa*

The website users have plenty of opportunity to see extensive galleries of pictures from official events such as the making of a new mayor or commemoration ceremonies. Looking at the picture below it is impossible to miss the importance of national symbols to Poles. The image presents a long table by which the officials are standing upright, with their heads high. The camera has been positioned lower than the table which creates the impression of the people appearing even more important. Their leadership roles have been delineated by the use of badges/labels placed in front of them. In the background there is the large Polish eagle and the flags of both Poland and Warsaw. The columns indicate a stable monumental building symbolising power.



*Figure 27 Warsaw's officials during the making of the new mayor*

The use of the symbols of authority, especially flags and emblems is frequent in the galleries showing Warsaw's officials (see appendix 6). These include the symbols of the city, of the country and of the European Union. In general, much more prominence is given to the power holders than to the citizens. The power holders appear to be elite and can rarely be seen interacting with the citizens- the mayor is rather shown with diplomats or politicians. Furthermore, the mayor and the councillors can rarely be seen interacting in less formal settings. Consequently, the people in power and the common people are not perceived as equals.

### **3.3.2.1 Power and authority summarised.**

Looking at the layout, information content and structure as well as the images, multimedia and accompanying text in the websites of the six cities described, it is clear that Polish city portals portray the authorities differently.

High status of authorities to the Poles has been shown in the prominent positions that the representatives of executive power have been given in the websites. This includes the central position of the mayor's picture with the personal message (home page in case of Kolno and a special, dedicated page in the case of Legnica; the first position in the hierarchy of the main menu for the city mayor of Warsaw). The language used to address the citizens was more official and formal. Kang and Mastin (2008) explain: "high power distance cultures perceive authoritative and official narratives more trustworthy". The use of colloquialisms in the speech of a mayor would be perceived as inappropriate and would immediately diminish their status of an educated persona. The educational achievements of the mayors and their subordinates have been listed in detailed CVs and/or biographies and by the use of titles in front of the names. City centre buildings which hold and control the power have been depicted „overseeing' the websites. Official symbols including local and national colours, frequent uses of coat of arms and flags shown with people in power underline their status and stress formality. Additionally, people in authority have often been depicted in the contexts where power is clearly in effect i.e. offices, assembly halls. Polish authorities have also often been shown during official ceremonies.

Websites of English cities described appear to be creating an atmosphere of a closer relationship with the users/citizens by the use of phrases: *Who do I contact about what, and how?*" (Colchester), *Who runs London?*", *—Above all, it's*

*Londoners who run London.*”, the availability to peek into the mayor’s diary and contact a councillor through the personal mobile/email address (Wells), or see the councillor’s earnings/spending (Colchester, London). The mayor of London follows the principle of —*powerful people should try to look less powerful than they are*” by his involvement with the community and colloquial language he uses when addressing Londoners in his videos. Although Colchester provides information on the making of new mayor, just like Warsaw, the focus seems to be on the citizen, rather than the mayor- while Colchester provides explanation of the ceremony with few small pictures, Warsaw shows an impressive gallery of images all focusing on the new appointed leader. Another interesting observation is that English local government officials appear much more confident about smiling. This simple gesture makes them much more approachable to the wider public making the distance smaller. Polish councillors and mayors seem to shy away from broad grins, giving the citizens only slight sign of cheerfulness in facial expressions. This might be for fear they will not look dignified enough or will not be taken seriously by the community.

### ***3.3.3 Cultural representations of Individualism and Collectivism.***

The cultural dimension of Individualism-Collectivism is concerned with the relationship that people have with society and individuals. Hofstede (2001, p.225) explains collectivism in terms of „a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty’. House et al. identified two „versions’ of collectivism. Institutional Collectivism is concerned with „the degree to which organisational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action’. In-Group Collectivism refers to „the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organisations and families’ (House, Javidan and Dorfman, 2001). Both Hofstede and House agree with the statement that England/Great Britain is more individualist than Poland. Nasierowski and Mikula (1998) state that low value of individualism in Poles is consistent with observations reported earlier by Sarapata (1977), Hirszel (1983), Holstein-Beck (1987) and Krolik (1993). Also, the results of Trompenaars’ (1993) research show that Eastern European countries including Poland score relatively low on individualism. Nasierowski and Mikula write: „On one hand, the levels of individualism are low, and on the other, collectivism (in the sense of the communist past, at least) is rejected’. They explain low individualism index with Polish tendency towards shared responsibility- „if all are responsible, nobody is’. Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede and Dienes (2002) support this claim. They argue: “Individual responsibility is often avoided. The ethic of shared responsibility of the socialist days may have promoted this tendency”. Hartog et al. (1997) cite Maczynski et al. (1993, 1994) who claim that exhaustive centralized planning in Poland caused a lack of responsibility in behaviour and

decision-making, demonstrated by both managers and subordinates. Centralised control of economic undertakings, they continue, highly directive systems, excessive bureaucracy and the passive attitude of employees all contributed to managerial autocracy. This not only must have influenced the lack of individualism in Poland but has also deepened the gap between those in authority and those below. Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede and Dienes (2002) see Poland in an intermediate position on individualism-collectivism scale<sup>21</sup> much more collectivistic than western Netherlands, and much more individualistic than Russia. Talking about Polish collectivism, they cite Yanouzas and Boukis (1993) who claim Poles are more inclined to form a group with strong trust relations, and work together to beat the enemy. Wedel (1992) writes that during occupation and the communist times, Poland strongly relied on tight groups: “moral credibility was won within social circles by mutual aid: the individual’s security rested on the family and social networks extending from and around it. Wedel further cites Nowak (1979) “The lowest level is the family, and perhaps the social circle. The highest is the nation... and in the middle is a social vacuum”. Polish collectivism thus, I propose could be perceived strong only when referred to the trusted circle. The attitude to everything outside this trusted circle, or within the „social vacuum’ as it was dubbed by Nowak, was a result of the communist prohibition to form open independent organisations and unregistered private or public meetings under the threat of conspiracy. The GLOBE research summary of the eastern European cluster, to which Poland belongs, sees these cultures as highly group-oriented and dominated by hierarchies (Bakacsi, Sandor, Andras and Viktor, 2002). Referring to

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<sup>21</sup> This relates to Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede and Dienes „(2002)research in Central Europe which compared Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia with The Netherlands.

the Anglo Cluster which England is part of, in the same research, Ashkanasy, Taylor-Roberts and Earnshaw (2002) write:

*—the Anglo Cluster does not want nor does it have , an over emphasis on group loyalty and collective interests (as opposed to individual goals and interests). (...) this result reflects that these cultures see their individualism to be derived from the struggle for self-dependence and personal material possessions—*

Berry, Segall and Kagitçibasi (1997) claim individualism is notable in Britain through the inspiration of ideas by Hobbes, Smith and Bentham. They also add that history points to „individualistic themes in family interactions, marriages, residence patterns, and inheritance’ in England from the early modern period (i.e. early 16<sup>th</sup> century). The politics of Thatcher have further supported individualism in more current period as has the diversification of society.

In collectivist societies, in-group ties are strong, group decision-making is desired and group interests take precedence over individual goals. In individualist cultures, the focus is on individual freedom and personal time, and individual decisions are encouraged. In the website context, a number of researchers has studied the individualism-collectivism dimension. Baack and Singh (2007) believe that community relations and family/tradition themes visible in the websites are consistent with Hofstede’s collectivism and Schwartz’s conservatism. According to Marcus and Gould (2000) collectivism in website and interface design would underplay individuals in favour of groups, give prominence to the aged and the experienced and emphasize tradition and history. In contrast, prominence given to individuals (shown by themselves), images of youth and action and emphasis on change (what’s new and unique) are the indicators of individualism. Ahmed, Mouratidis and Preston (2008) believe that pictures of congregations and major events, representing an attempt to provide family-oriented activities would follow in



websites from collective values of the society. Finally, Singh and Matsuo (2002) add symbols and pictures of national identity as a sign of collectivism in a website.

In this part of the chapter, I will investigate the ways in which citizens have been portrayed in the graphics, multimedia and accompanying text to see whether collectivist or individualist themes prevail in the websites of English and Polish cities.

An in-depth analysis of the three English websites shows both individualist and collectivist themes.

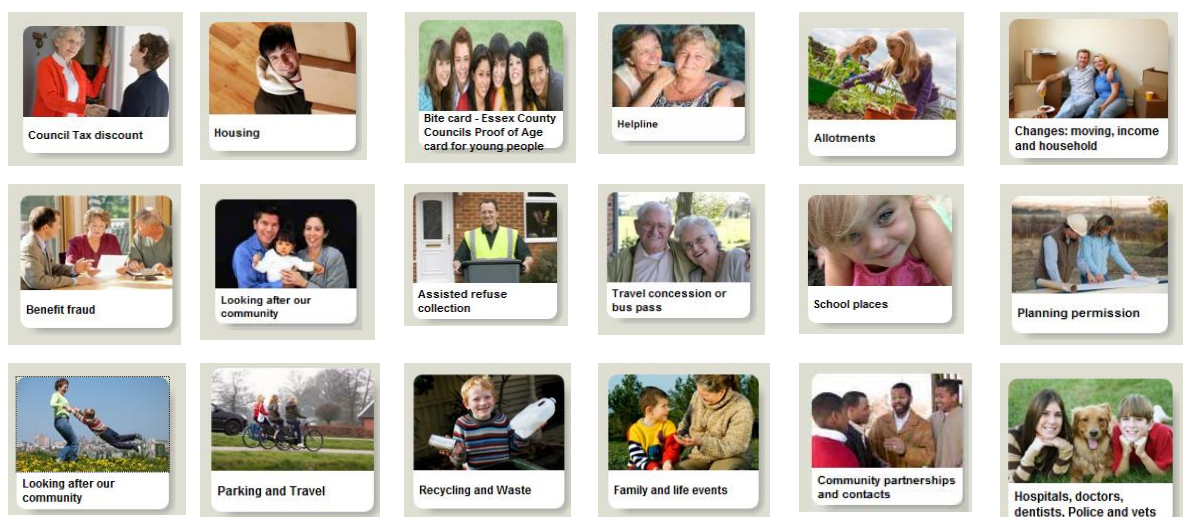
The website of Wells provides a special section devoted to local community. It reads: *“Wells City Council is proud to support the diverse range of Volunteer groups and organisations that exist in and around Wells”* stressing the fact that people organise themselves into local collectives which are of a diverse nature. It further lists some of the organisations working for the citizens in Wells. The text is accompanied by the two pictures presented below. One of them clearly represents a family protected by the parents outside with the children inside. Hofstede (2001, p.227) states that in high individualism societies everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family. The other picture shows a smiley, unidentified middle aged tennis player. The picture further supports the feel of individualism with the sense of independence, self actualisation and emphasis on personal time and freedom.

Although mention of its citizens in the website of Wells is rather limited, they seem to be portrayed in both collective and individualist lights. The collectivism is noticeable through the list of organisations working together in voluntary groups, while individualism is present in the images of the people of Wells portrayed.



Figure 28 People of Wells as presented in the website

The website of Colchester, contrary to the website of Wells, uses a great number of images of people. These pictures serve to visually support a wide variety of the issues raised in the portal. People have been shown alone, in pairs, or in small group of friends/family members, work colleagues, or class mates. The cross-section of community has been depicted- from babies to the elderly, professionals and private individuals, men and women of all ages and from various ethnic backgrounds. Social roles and stereotypes appear to have been broken with a man (and not a woman) taking care of his infant, young boy (and not a housewife) taking responsibility for recycling, young girls (and not retired grandparents) working in allotments and an elderly woman (and not a young businessman) working on her notebook checking the progress of her building site online.





*Figure 29 Variety of topics supported by the use of images showing people*



*Figure 30 Computer-confident elderly lady*

This contradiction of popular stereotypes shows an individualist society based on independence, self respect and uniqueness. Frequent use of portraits of people on their own or in small groups shows prominence given to individuals. In some of the pictures showing groups of people, the camera focuses on specific individuals giving the impression that while belonging to a wider group, the person, at the same is the only one of its kind and is looked at as an individual.



Figure 31 Individualist focus on people shown in groups

The picture below gives prominence to website visitors. The text next to the picture of a person swimming in a pool speaks directly to the addressee (usage of personal „you’) referring to the ways in which the leisure centre will now be available to suit the addressee better. This shows an appreciation of visitors’ time.



Figure 32 Focus on website visitors

*Looking after our community* section in Colchester website reads: “We all contribute to making a safe neighbourhood the background to daily life” stressing the importance of everyone’s contribution to the welfare of the local community.

Colchester website depicts images of people from a variety of backgrounds denying social stereotypes. The pictures and text emanate with tolerance and appreciation of the individuals while, at the same time, showing them in relation to a wider community for which they should also care. The website of London, too, shows a diverse community with a strong focus on meeting their needs. The website pages contain banners in which the authorities talk about what they do for the people. Not only does this represent the appreciation of every individual in the metropolis, but also the *being there for the people* attitude implying that citizens





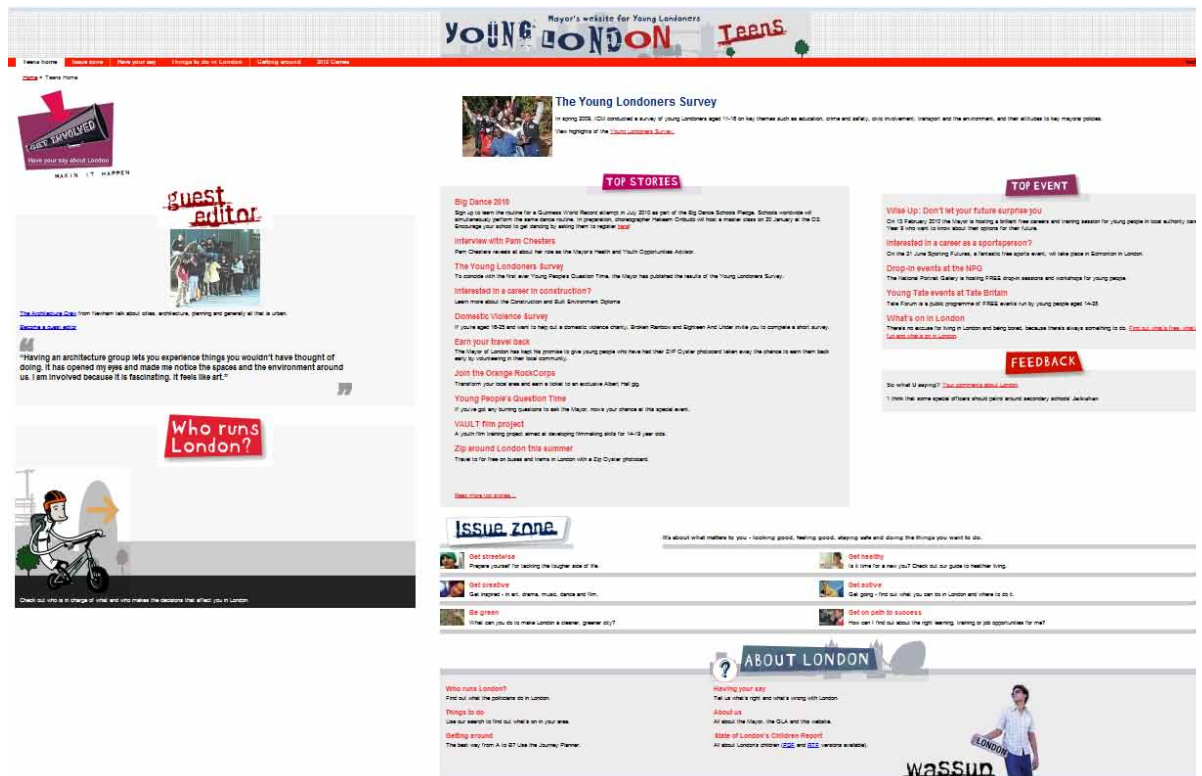


Figure 35 London's website dedicated to younger users

Although appreciating diversity of individuals in London, the website gives much prominence to common issues, especially with regards to working together for the welfare of everyone. This is visible in the Team London initiative which encourages Londoners to volunteer, emphasizing social responsibility, the slogan reads: 'Transforming London together'.

Polish websites downplay the role of individuals. The website of Kolno is filled with galleries showing citizens during cultural and sports events. A vast majority of pictures show people as a mass. Be it performers or the audience, the images do not appear to concentrate on specific subjects, but rather capture the scene as it is, with no careful consideration of framing. The activities presented are mostly group sports or performances, such as football, volleyball, town picnic, carol singing, nativity plays, etc. The image below has been taken from *The Family Picnic* organised by the city council. It presents community as a whole. Individuals are underplayed- there is no focus on any specific person and no one face can be

seen clearly. The people in the picture have been „cut“ as if it was not important whether they were fully visible or not. *The Family Picnic* reconstructs a small family event on a much larger, municipal scale.



*Figure 36 The Family Picnic in Kolno*

Images portraying individuals in the website are rare. If given prominence by having a separate portrait, they are shown in the interplay with or entertaining the wider community. This is different, however, if they are an important person in the town such as the mayor. The picture below shows a young entertainer, possibly a singer, addressing the audience.



*Figure 37 Young entertainer in the website of Kolno*

Individuals in group pictures are presented as belonging to the mass of people around them without any distinguishable features. Neither of the people in the group pictures have been made distinguishable from others by the photographer's use of zoom or focus (*see Appendix 7 for full selection*). Similarly to the website of Kolno, people of Legnica have been portrayed mostly during cultural and sports events. Again, they belong to larger organisational groups, such as a sports team,

school class or entertainment group. The image below presents a student group during school congregation. They stand in front of the city flag looking at the audience waiting for the start of the ceremony. None of the people in the group has been given prominence, rather they have been shown through group unity.



*Figure 38 Students in the website of Legnica*

People framed individually in the pictures are VIPs: the mayor, people receiving his awards/bursaries, or the honoured citizens. The picture below shows the mayor presenting an award to a young sportswoman. The distance of power is clear with the girl lowering her head while shaking the hand with the mayor. In the second picture she presents her award to the camera. The fact that she received the award makes her „deserve’ a portrait of her own.



*Figure 39 Girl receiving an award from Legnica's mayor*



The idea of the deserved ones has been strongly emphasized in the *Deserved for Town* section of the website. The section, which has been placed in a very prominent position (first item in the menu *About the city*) first provides rules and procedures for granting the title and then lists the *Honorary Citizens of the City of Legnica*. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997, p.113) write about status ascribing cultures in which status is attributed to those who “naturally evoke admiration from others, that is, older people, males, highly qualified persons and/or persons skilled in a technology or project deemed to be of national importance”. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s research indicates that Poland is a much more ascriptive culture than Britain which assigns status according to achievement. This explains the idea of *the deserved ones*, who, according to the rules of Legnica’s website must fulfil the following criteria in order to be considered: 1) *high ethical level represented by a candidate*; 2) *special achievements of a candidate*. John Paul II, dubbed *the main claim to national pride* by Szostkiewicz (1992), features on the websites of both Legnica and Warszawa. He is the representative of tradition and history and is given an extremely high status by the society. Figs. 40 and 41 below show the deserved ones in Legnica and the animation, taken from Warszawa’s subpage devoted especially to John Paul II- a counter of time left to his beatification. Furthermore, Warszawa’s homepage presents pictures of important people together with their quotes about the city.

The idea of ascribed status also explains strong usage of educational titles in Polish, and infrequent mention of these, in English websites. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) talking about the usage of titles in Britain point out

academic achievements might be perceived inappropriate in work situations and status claimed in this way would not be legitimate.



Figure 40 Some of the Honorary Citizens of the City of Legnica



Figure 41 John Paul II beatification counter from the website of Warszawa

People of Legnica have been portrayed in relation to a larger society. People with power (such as the mayor, the deputy mayor) and the highly- respected i.e. war veterans, religious leaders and people who contributed to the city are the exception and have been depicted as individuals. Individualism in the sense of people being different/ coming from various backgrounds has been shown mostly in the section devoted to the Roma. The section is called „Program Pomocy Romom’ (*Help Programme for the Roma*) and instantly gives the impression of segregation and patronising attitude of the Poles towards the Roma. Contrary to the websites of Colchester and London which appear to treat all ethnic groups

inclusively of the society, the Roma in Legnica seem to be treated next to the Polish culture, and not a part of it.

Similar pattern in representations of the people of Warszawa has been noticed. Again, unless important or respected, they have been portrayed in mass, as part of a large group. The images below show prominence given to the VIPs with the rest of individuals underplayed, which is an indication of both large power distance and of mass-treatment of people as opposed to seeing them as a group full of diverse individuals (for a larger selection, see Appendix 9).



Figure 42 Varsovians in the website of Warszawa's city council

There are, nevertheless, some elements indicating that people of Warsaw are considered as individuals. The collage below supports the topic of *Social Policy* in the website. It presents individuals of various ages (but not of various ethnic backgrounds). Also, the stereotype of the elderly in relation to modern technology seems to be reinforced with one of the pictures in the collage. It illustrates an elderly woman being shown something on the notebook by two young boys. She seems overwhelmed with the new technology and is a contradiction to the computer-confident elderly lady shown in the website of Colchester (Fig. 30). The collage, apart from showing individuals as the make-up of society, shows the buildings as the representation of power. Furthermore, the buildings have been

shown „equal’ to the citizens, and not, as in the collage in London’s website (Fig. 34), visible in the background.



Figure 43 The collage shown in the context of Social Policy in the website of Warszawa



Figure 44 Polish elderly lady using a computer [image taken from the collage above]

The images of common people, i.e. ones who are not VIPs, are visible on the website of Warsaw. These, however, have not been authored by the city council. Instead, they represent the view of the people of Warsaw themselves, as photographers taking part in the photo competition entitled ‘This is my part of Warsaw’. The mere fact that they have been published shows the appreciation of people as individuals and not only as wider community.



*Figure 45 Individuals in the website of Warszawa, authored by private photographers*

### **3.3.3.1 Collectivism & Individualism summarised**

An in-depth examination of the six websites has shown features of Individualism and Collectivism present to some degrees in both Polish and English websites.

Website personalisation features including contrast and font size adjustment, text only option, translation to a variety of languages or audio versions were present to varying degrees in all of the websites described. Additionally, log in options allowing visitors to post comments was present in Colchester and London website, whereas a separate tab for comments and suggestions of the users was present in Warszawa's portal. Wells, on its homepage, welcomed visitors to send suggestions on how to improve the site. Kolno had a separate forum for the queries of the citizens. This shows both the focus on the visitor and serves the role of the chat room, therefore it functions both in terms of individualism and collectivism. Focus on the visitor and their goals was further visible in the organisation structure of the website of Colchester, which divided the content into actions (‘apply’/‘book’/‘check’, etc.), but also in Warszawa, with division into for citizens, for tourists, for the business, therefore showing the appreciation of the website users' time. Direct communication style was mostly noticeable in the website of London, where the mayor addressed Londoners' in the language they are likely to use themselves. Sophistication of language was visible in the speeches of Kolno's and Legnica's mayors.

Out of collectivist website features, emphasis on social responsibility, promotion of collectivist values and theme of tradition and history were most noticeable. The emphasis on social responsibility and promotion of collectivist values were present in the *Team London/Get Involved* section, and in community sections in

Colchester and Wells. The Polish websites also included themes of social responsibility in the form of information about NGOs, social campaign posters (for example poster calling on people not to be indifferent when faced with a homeless person in frosty, winter conditions). The theme of history and tradition is strongly reinforced in the websites of Warszawa (with the section *Warsaw remembers*, John Paul II page), Legnica (banners inviting to cultural-historical event such as a medieval fight, history of the city, honoured citizens section), and Kolno (extended city history). Similar elements, are also present on the website of Wells (city crier on the homepage) and Colchester (picture of the castle).

The portrayal of citizens in visuals presents more differences in terms of collectivism-individualism than other elements of the websites. The study of images indicates that the three Polish cities are more inclined, than the three English cities, to present people in mass with no focus on individuals. Much less images of families than expected was shown, focusing rather on larger groups. The rather careless framing might indicate an ignorant attitude to larger society in Poles reflecting Nowak's idea of the „social vacuum’. In Polish websites, portraits were reserved for the leaders, people with status, those respected and those who deserved it. Projection of people in groups downplays the role of the individuals and emphasises collectivism of culture at the same time enhancing the status of the individuals portrayed separately. Polish websites displayed stronger importance given to history and tradition, which according to Baack and Singh (2007) denotes collectivism.

In this respect, therefore, Poland appears to be less individualistic, although this does not mean that English websites are solely concentrating on individualism. Contrary, commitment to cooperation and community spirit was evident through

volunteering and NGOs sections promoting collectivist values and social responsibility. Strong evidence of individualism in English websites was evident. Pictures in Colchester portal showed many more individualistic or small group shots than shots of larger community. Where a group was visible, often the camera concentrated on one of the individuals making the others blurred. Images in the website of London, showed both large groups and individuals. Images of large groups displayed equal space distribution and no evidence of social hierarchy (created for instance by using a top perspective). They also depicted a cross section of society including many ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as age groups.



## Conclusions

It is extremely dangerous to generalise the features of national websites on a small sample of data with a subjective qualitative description, therefore a quantitative analysis of larger amount of data is needed to confirm the findings.

This study has, however, provided some interesting observations.

The examination of content, form and structures of the websites has shown that the websites of Polish cities tend to publish much more information on their homepages. The websites are link rich and use a wide variety of formatting styles and colour on one page. In contrast, the websites of three English cities described are much plainer, are consistent in formatting and use pastel colours.

This could be an indication that the Polish culture is more polychronic than the English culture.

Greater emphasis on the use of regional and national symbols (such as flags, coats of arms, regional/national colours and historical descriptions) was noticed on the Polish websites. It could be suggested that the city authorities attempted to extend their legitimacy and formality over the informal nature of the internet. In their representation on the internet, the English cities used rather low amount of regional and national symbols and relayed infrequently to history.

Finally, when it comes to cultural dimensions, the results of the study show that different values have been portrayed in the two cultures. Although the investigation of *Uncertainty Avoidance* in the websites has shown rather ambiguous results, more consistent data was obtained with regards to the other two. First, *Power Distance* in England appears to be much smaller than in Poland. This was mostly visible through attempts to appear less powerful among English power holders,

and the opposite pattern among the Poles depicted in the portals. Secondly, the English websites reflected much more *Individualism* in their portrayal of people as *distinctive entities*, whereas Polish cities shown people as *a mass*.

This analysis was extremely engaging and enjoyable to me due to personal interest in cross-cultural differences as well as the knowledge of both cultures. In order to validate the findings, however, a broader research is needed.

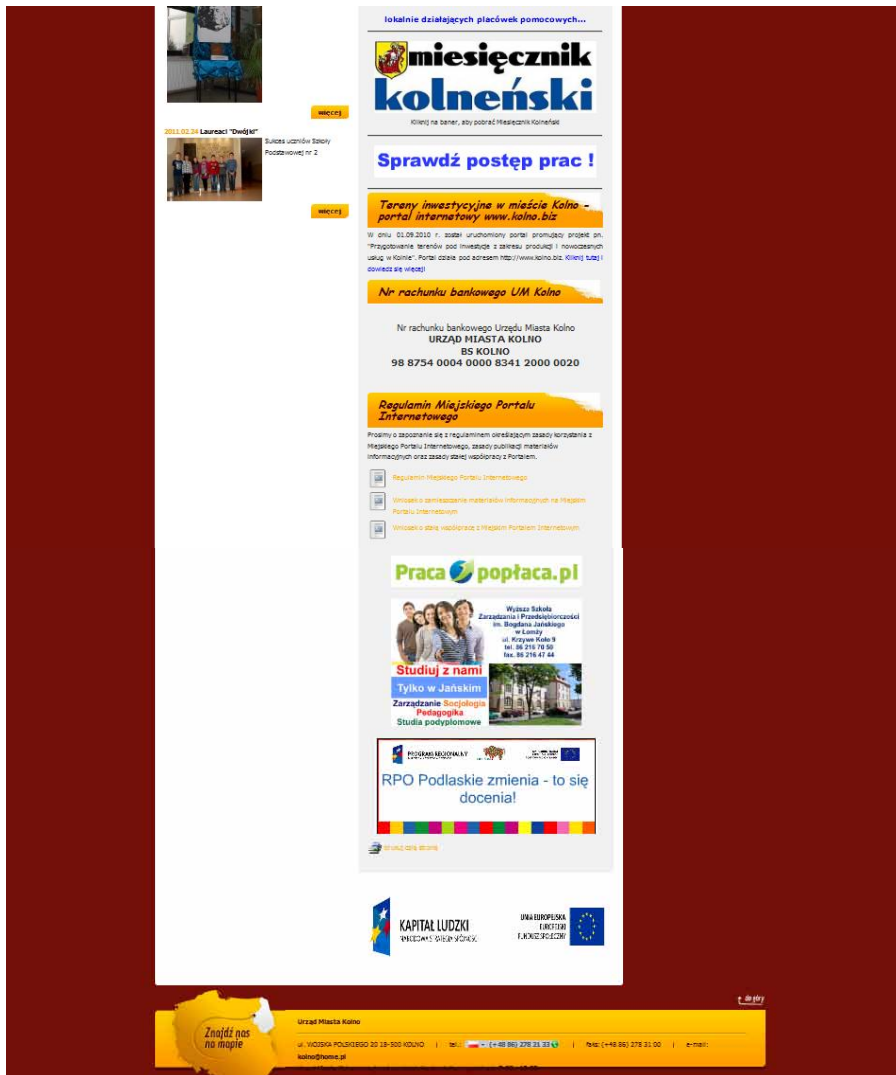
# Appendices

## Appendix 1

The screenshot displays the official website of the City of Kolno, Poland. The header features the city's coat of arms and the name "Urząd Miasta Kolno". A search bar is present with the text "Wyszukaj: WCRB Nowo Kuzowie". The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Najnowsze wydarzenie:** "Pierwsza Gala Sportu w Kolnie" (First Sports Gala in Kolno) on 01.03.2011, featuring a photo of a sports event.
- Pozostałe wydarzenia:** "Koncert zespołu 'Samy swat'" (Concert of the band 'Samy swat') on 01.03.2011, and "Dofinansowanie MKiDN" (MKiDN financing) on 01.03.2011.
- Strona Główna:** A central section with a photo of a man in a suit, likely a city official, and text about the city's website and services.
- Warto uwagi:** A sidebar with links to "Zobacz ogłoszenia" (View announcements), "Zobacz nasze filmy" (View our films), and "Ankieta" (Survey).
- Reklama:** A banner for "miesięcznik kolneński" (Kolno monthly magazine).
- ZAPRASZAMY ROLNIKÓW ORAZ DOMOWNIKÓW ROLNIKÓW:** A section with a poster for agricultural and farmer events.
- 5-LETNIE JEDNOLITE STUDIA MAGISTERSKIE:** A section for 5-year master's degree programs.
- Wyniki otwartego konkursu ofert na realizację zadań publicznych z zakresu wspierania i upowszechniania kultury fizycznej i sportu oraz ochrony i promocji środowia na terenie miasta Kolno w 2011 roku:** A section for the results of an open tender for public tasks in sports and environment.
- „Nie bądźmy obojętni...“:** A section with a poster about social responsibility and helping those in need.

The bottom of the page contains contact information for the city office, including the address "ul. Wolności 13, Kolno" and the phone number "99 278-92-78".



Kolno City Council website at all its length– winter version (homepage)

## Appendix 2

**LEGNICA** z nią zawsze po drodze

OFICJALNY PORTAL MIASTA

Strona główna | wiadomości | ogłoszenia | zamówienia publiczne | przetargi | oferty inwestycyjne | oferty pracy | plan miasta | wirtualny spacer | multimedia | BIP

**Strona główna**

Strona główna

**GŁOSUJ NA LEGNICĘ codziennie na MONOPOLY**

Wiadomości | Z życia miasta | Kultura | Sport i Turystyka

**Prezydent Legnicy skierował wyrazy współczucia do Ambasadora Japonii**  
W związku z tragedią, jaka doznała dziś mieszkańców Japonii, prezydent Tadeusz Krzakowski wystosował list do szefa Eksceleencji Ambasadora Japonii w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Yuichi Kusumoto.

**O Legnicy w "Gazecie Wyborczej"**  
W ostatnim numerze dodatku „Gazety Wyborczej” - „Tygodnik z Dolnego Śląska” z dnia 10 marca br. ukazał się artykuł o Legnicy.

**Urząd Miasta Legnicy przystępuje do sprzedaży w drodze aukcji**  
Urząd Miasta Legnicy przystępuje do sprzedaży w drodze aukcji elektronicznej drewna pozyskanego w wyniku wydatki drzew uszkodzonych przez huragan w Parku Miejskim.

**Ruszyła realizacja programu bezpłatnych badań profilaktycznych dla dzieci**  
Wojewódzki Szpital Specjalistyczny w Legnicy rozpoczął 7 marca br. realizację programu bezpłatnych badań profilaktycznych dla sześciu lat dzieci w wieku od trzech do dziewięciu lat.

**Świadczenia zdrowotne w porze nocnej, w dni wolne od pracy i w święta**  
Harmonogram nocnych dyżurów aptek w Legnicy - Marzec 2011 r.

**Nagrody dla najlepszych i najpopularniejszych sportowców Zagłębia Miedziowego rozdane**

**Prezydent Tadeusz Krzakowski przewodniczącym Komisji Rewizyjnej Związku Miast Polskich**

**Zapraszamy na Galę Sportu Zagłębia Miedziowego**

wszystkie aktualności  
archiwum

**MULTIMEDIA**  
Legnicki wieczór zobacz

**GALERIE ZDJĘĆ**  
Gala Sportu Zagłębia Miedziowego 04.03.2011 r. Hotel Qubus fot. M. Banaszkiewicz zobacz galerię  
Zobacz wszystkie galerie

**Sukcesy Legnicy w pozyskiwaniu funduszy w ramach RPOWD**

Strona główna | Aktualności | Ogłoszenia | Zamówienia publiczne | Oferty inwestycyjne | Baza dokumentów | Oferty pracy | Mapa | Wirtualny spacer | Komunikacja | Multimedia | BIP

Urząd Miasta Legnica, Plac Słowiański 8, 58-220 Legnica, tel. 76 721 21 99, fax 76 721 21 15, e-mail: kancelaria(at)legnica.eu; webmaster(at)legnica.eu  
Bank Pekao S.A. / Oddział Legnica 40 1240 1473 1111 0000 2521 2040  
REGON 390 647 251, NIP 691 00 11 742  
Redakcja portalu

Wykonanie **CONCEPT** Intermedia

Legnica City Council website –winter version (homepage)



# Appendix 3

The screenshot displays the official website of Legnica, Poland, with the slogan "z nią zawsze po drodze" (with it always on the road). The page features a top navigation bar with a search function and language selection. A large aerial photograph of the city serves as the background for the header.

The main content area is divided into several sections:

- NAŠE MIAŠTO (Our City):** A vertical menu on the left lists various city services and information, including "Zasłuzeni dla miasta" (Honorary citizens), "Co i gdzie w Legnicy" (What and where in Legnica), "Kalendarium" (Calendar), "Historia" (History), "Kroniki miasta" (City chronicles), "Zabytki" (Monuments), "Śladami Małej Moskwy" (Traces of Little Moscow), "Kultura" (Culture), "Sport" (Sports), "Wyróżnienia Śmieszny" (Distinctions), "Miasta partnerskie" (Partner cities), "Miasto zieleni" (Green city), "Szlaki turystyczne" (Tourist routes), "Komunikacja" (Communication), "Marka Miasta" (City brand), and "TVL" (City TV).
- PRZYJAZNI MIAŠTA LEGNICA (Friendly Cities of Legnica):** A section for international city partnerships.
- URZĄD MIAŠTA (City Office):** A section for official city services, including "Co i gdzie w Urzędzie" (What and where in the office), "Regulaminy organizacyjny" (Organizational regulations), "Kodeks etyczny" (Code of ethics), "Polityka jakości i bezpieczeństwa informacji" (Quality and information security policy), "Program pomocy Romom" (Roma assistance program), "e-Urząd - Skrzynka Podawcza" (e-Office - Mailbox), and "Informacyjne Karty Usług" (Informational service cards).
- Wielkie wiosenne sprzątanie (Great Spring Cleaning):** An article dated 13th March 2011, discussing the importance of cleanliness and order in public spaces.
- Harmonogram dyżurów nocnych legnickich aptek na kwiecień 2011 r. (Night pharmacy duty schedule for Legnica for April 2011):** A notice regarding the schedule for night pharmacies.
- Plaga dzikich wysypisk (Wild dumpsites):** An article dated 1st April 2011, highlighting the problem of illegal dumpsites and the city's efforts to address them.
- Galeria SATYRYKON zaprasza na Grucę (Satyrkon Gallery invites to Gruga):** An announcement for an art exhibition titled "Pastle..." by Slawomir Gruga.
- PKP Energetyka SA Zakład Dołnośląski zadba o oświetlenie uliczne w Legnicy (PKP Energetyka SA Legnica branch will take care of street lighting in Legnica):** A notice about the planned street lighting project.
- Strona www.legnica.eu może być w piątek niedostępna (www.legnica.eu website may be unavailable on Friday):** A warning about potential website downtime.
- Samorządowcy LGON o problemach miast i gmin regionu (Municipal council members of LGON on regional city and commune problems):** A report on regional issues.
- Sytuacja radiacyjna nie stwarza żadnego zagrożenia dla zdrowia (Radiation situation does not pose any health threat):** A reassurance regarding radiation levels.
- W Legnicy zużycie rozpocznie się obowiązkowa kwantyfikacja woskowina (In Legnica, the mandatory quantification of wax will begin):** A notice about a new regulatory requirement.
- Kibolowi nie uszło na sucho (Football fans were not spared):** A short news item.

On the right side of the page, there is a "KALENDARIUM MIEZIECZY (Monthly Calendar)" for April 2011, a "Galeria SATYRYKON" section, and a "Wielki finał Plebiscytu 'LEGNICKIE OSKARY 2011' (Great final of the 'LEGNICKIE OSKARY 2011' plebiscite)" announcement.

The bottom of the page features several promotional banners and logos, including "Sukcesy legnicy w pozyskiwaniu funduszy w ramach RPOWD" (Successes of Legnica in raising funds under the RPOWD), "Legnicki wieczór" (Legnica evening), "770 rocznica świąt pod Legnicą" (770th anniversary of the Legnica Feast), "Legnicki sezon kulturalny" (Legnica cultural season), "Legnica DSA SA", "KS MIECZ I LEGNICA", "Bitwa z Mongołami na Dobrym Polu 1241" (Battle of Dobry Pol with the Mongols 1241), and "Narodowy Spis Powszechny 2011" (National Census 2011).



*Legnica City Council website– spring version (homepage)*

# Appendix 4

**MIASTO STOLECZNE WARSZAWA**

EN RSS Kontakt **Wersja BETA** [Strona](#)

**Dziesiątki miejsc na poranne spacerowanie >**

Strona główna O Warszawie Aktualności Załatw sprawę w urzędzie Dla mieszkańców Dla firm i inwestorów Turystyka i wypoczynek Kultura i sztuka

**Aktualności**

Wydarzenia Dla biznesu

**To do Ciebie wróci! Rozliczaj PIT w Warszawie**

**Sprawozdanie z wykonania budżetu za 2010 r.**  
Prezydent m. st. Warszawy przekazała Radzie Miasta st. Warszawy oraz RUC sprawozdanie roczne z wykonania budżetu m. st. Warszawy za 2010 rok. Dochody m. st. Warszawy w 2010 r. wyniosły 10,4 mld zł a wydatki 12,1 mld zł, z czego prawie 2,6 mld zł stanowiły wydatki na stołeczne inwestycje.

**Nowy plakat zaprosi na Noc Muzeów**  
We wtorek, 5 kwietnia, godz. 15.00 (Museum Małki Bittolowiczki Curic, ul. Preta 16) zapraszamy na ogłoszenie wyników konkursu na plakat reklamujący tegoroczną Noc Muzeów.

**Szpital na Solcu ma już 90 lat**  
W poniedziałek, 4 kwietnia o godz. 14.00 zapraszamy przedstawicieli mediów do Teatru Alenium (ul. Jarska 2) na 90. urodziny Szpitala na Solcu.

**Rocznica katastrofy pod Smoleńskiem – akredytacje prasowe**

**Otwieramy Warsztat na pl. Konstytucji**

**Zagłosuj na najlepszą warszawską inicjatywę pozarządową**

**Forum: Uczeń zdolny wyzwaniem dla edukacji**

**Spot o nobilitacje na nowej podstronie ratusza**

**Rozliczaj PIT w Warszawie - briefing prasowy**

**Emisja stołecznych obligacji na rynku krajowym**

**Najpopularniejsze strony**

- Miejskie nieruchomości na sprzedaż
- Organizacje pozarządowe
- Informacje o remontach dróg
- Europejska Stolica Kultury 2018
- Zamówienia publiczne
- Buletyn Informacji Publicznej

Infolinia Urzędu m. st. Warszawy ☎ **800 707 047**  
 Infolinia Służby Dyżurnej Miasta ☎ **800 707 112**  
 Tel. interwencyjny: 199 56  
 Straż miejska: 986

**Zaląż spraw w urzędzie**

Mieszkańcy Przedsiębiorcy

- Zażądanie mieszkanie do zamiany
- Podatki i opłaty lokalne
- Dowód osobisty
- Meldunek
- Prawo jazdy
- Urząd Stanu Cywilnego

**Informacje kulturalne**

Dzisiaj Jutro wt. Śr. Czw. Pi. Sob.

- Miroslaw Balka w Zamku Ujazdowskim
- Wystawa "Polskie dzieci, młodość i szkoły na łutych szlakach 1939-1948"
- XV Ogólnopolski Przegląd Piosenki Dorośliwej i Młodzieżowej "Rozdziewany Wawer"
- "Nikt nie będzie z tego strzał!" - wystawa Andrzeja Owsińskiego
- "Kompleksowe Usługi Pogrzebowe Niebo, Piękno" - wystawa Artura Matewskiego
- Wystawa prac uczestników programu Krajowego Funduszu na rzecz Dzieci
- "Rudy Iluzar" - wystawa Łukasza Rudnickiego i Marka Ejsmonda-Szwarczyka
- Aerobiscals - "bale" modeli zlatne sterowanych, latających do rytmów muzyki
- Spotkania z Rękodzielnictwem Ludowym na elektrycznej
- Chór Kobiet w Instytucie Teatralnym im. Zygmunta Raszelewskiego

**Turystyka i wypoczynek**

Przydatne informacje Ciekawe miejsca

- Informacja turystyczna
- Informacje podstawowe
- Komunikacja miejska
- Wydarzenia cykliczne
- Broszury do pobrania
- Top 10
- Warszawa dla dzieci
- Trakt Królewski
- Punkty widokowe
- Okołce Warszawy

**Warszawa pamięta**

Centrum Miast JP2 Miejsca pamięci 44 Powstanie w getcie Historyczne miejsca żydowskie Złota Warszawy Warszawa w social media Koronka Warszawy Mapa Warszawy

**Ważne linki**  
 Statut m.st. Warszawy  
 Obligacje m.st. Warszawy  
 System Identyfikacji Wzajemnej  
 UEFA EURO 2012 (TM)  
 Europejska Stolica Kultury 2018

**Dla mieszkańców**  
 Konsultacje społeczne  
 eUrząd  
 Szukasz pracy?  
 Jak załatwić sprawę w Urzędzie?  
 Gdzie szukać pomocy?

**Dla biznesu**  
 Miejskie nieruchomości na sprzedaż  
 Aktualności dla inwestorów  
 Komunitaty dla inwestorów  
 Opracowania, statystyki  
 Dla pracodawców

**Dla turystów**  
 Warszawa Chopina  
 Warszawa na weekend  
 Atrakcje turystyczne  
 Noclegi  
 Noclegi

© Urząd m.st. Warszawy Polityka prywatności Webmaster Kontakt Projekt: Making Waves

Warszawa City Council website (homepage)



## Appendix 5



*Kolno's councillors and mayor at work*

## Appendix 6





*Power holders of Warsaw*



## Appendix 7





*People portrayed in website of Kolno*



## Appendix 8



*People portrayed in the website of Legnica*

Appendix 9



*People portrayed in the website of Warszawa*

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