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LOCAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONALIZATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

**Theoretical
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Abstract

Currently Romania is in the process of regionalization whose foundations were laid in the "Green Paper regional development in Romania", elaborated under the aegis of the EU Delegation in our country. Regional development is a defining concept of EU construction and at the same time it constitutes a monitoring parameter of any country that wishes to join this structure. Not incidentally, one of the most important directions of the European Commission is called "Regional development and social cohesion". Against the background of regional development trends, the brand of the region is the one that will make the difference. The concept of branding applied to countries, cities and regions began to be used in the mid-90s in order to support these geographical areas in their fierce competition in the competitive environment. In this era of "super-brands" is nothing unusual to consider a city, a country or a region as being a successful brand.

Introduction

The principles underlying the development and implementation of regional development policies are:

- ◆ *Decentralization of decision-making process according to the principle of subsidiarity;*
- ◆ *Partnership between all actors involved in regional development;*
- ◆ *Planning - the process of allocating resources in order to achieve established objectives;*
- ◆ *Cofinancing - the financial contribution of the various actors involved in implementing programs and regional development projects.*

We are dealing today with the most communicative society of all time. Countries and cities are in competition to attract tourists, investment, talent and credibility. Brands facilitate the choosing process of the people. For this reason it is preferable that the city be conducted as a "brand" commercial with the aim of confirming the identity and perceived value within a market dominated by a competition increasingly fierce. Cities and regions form a unique blend of dynamism and growth, modernism and innovation, infrastructure and technology, attractiveness and quality. They represent engines of cultural and economic development - strong centers storing valuable resources but also innovation. Within these, the advanced technology and tourism play an important role.

„The brand of a city represents the amount of all perceptions and associations that people have in relation to a particular city” - www.ceosforcities.org/rethink/research/files/CEOsforCitiesBrandingYourCity2006.pdf

These may include past experiences, movies, news, advertisements, access to information, weather, prices, opinions of friends and citizens of that city. A strong brand can shape a city's personality and may confer quality. A real brand takes into account not only the "hard" aspects such as taxes, infrastructure, costs, and logistics networks, but also matters more "sensitive" like mentality and tolerance, art and culture, nature and health of the population. One such brand proves not only the quality of resources (such as land, labour or capital) but also the quality of life (city ambience, services and opportunities in recreation). Factors determining the *necessity for city branding* (www.placebrands.net) are the following:

- promotion of democracy and democratic governance as well as increased transparency trend of activities of local authorities;
- power increasingly larger of the international media, generated by an audience that seeks to be as well informed;
- variety of assortments of products and services in different countries lead to the necessity to increase confidence in both

the production company and the country of origin;

- in the case of poorer cities and less developed, there is a need to compete for international funding, technology, transfer of skills, investment, export markets;
- cities compete to attract talented immigrants;
- strong demand from citizens for a broader cultural environment and richer, stimulated by rapid growth of means of communication and digital media with low costs;
- necessity of attraction and retention: determination of local citizens and business people to stay in town, while encouraging others to come to live and develop their businesses here.

The competition to gain as many residents is the consequence of globalization and technologization.

„Successful brands are those that differ from others, which are a valuable promise and then manage to satisfy and facilitate the process of choice for potential buyers” (Michel Chevalier, Gerald Mazzalovo (2003), Brands as a factor of progress, Palgrave Macmillan Publisher, p. 25.). The brand may not be worth more than a logo or a piece of paper given that it is not adopted, sustained and revitalized by the stakeholders of the city. This proves that the brand is built at each point of customer contact with the city. Each of these critical contact points play a vital role in the construction and transmission of promised brand experience.

Today a positive identity of the brand is no longer just an option. A city, a region, an area that is not proactively engaged in a process of branding, is likely to be automatically placed on the market at a disadvantageous position by competitors and the mass media. It is required putting in place a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond the superficiality of a logo or advertisement.

The specialty literature reveals that the brand of the region is composed of the following elements:

- **Location.** In this issue are explored people's perceptions on physical appearance of each city, on how they would feel if they visit a particular city.
- **Potential.** This point of the hexagon takes into account the economic and educational opportunities that cities offer to residents, to business people and tourists. In order to reach a determination of the potential of a city, citizens are asked how hard they believe it would be to find a job in a particular city or, if that would be businessmen, how properly would be a particular city for business development.

Also, this interests people's opinion regarding possibilities for enriching educational qualifications in a particular city.

- **Pulse.** Vibrant lifestyle is an important element of the brand image of a city. Here is measured the degree of interest cities shall present for tourists in the short term as well as long-term residents.
- **People.** People build the city. In this aspect of the hexagon, the question arises whether a city's residents are friendly and warm, or conversely, cold in relation to those coming from outside. Another important aspect considered is the degree of security.
- **Basic needs.** In this section, people are asked about their perceptions of the basic qualities of a city: how hard it is to find accommodation in the city, which is the average level of services offered in the city, such as education, health, public transport and sport.

The functionality and the added value of city brands

Cities, areas, regions, acting as brands, must be functional. "And the products, as in the case of cities, functionality means observable benefits". A city must function as a destination for employment, industry, public transport and attractions. For example, New York has all this and achieves this separately. A person does not need a car to visit New York because all the tourist attractions can be visited on foot, by taxi, metro or other means of public transport. This functionality is part of the metropolis New York. Not all products are brands. True brands not only provide functional benefits but also non-functional added value. Strong brands need to create added value in the minds of consumers. Added value turns into loyalty and this loyalty is the key factor in determining the success of a brand. Taking as an example the city of New York, the next question whose answer I will try to provide through the doctoral thesis: "What is the functionality and added value of the brand for this town?"

For what do the cities compete?

Cities compete to secure full development and achieve human resources, investment, new technologies and, as a result, leadership. Consequently, their competitiveness is determined by a more efficient use of resources, ability to attract resources, forming an attractive offer to the public, tourists, business environment.

In connection with the consolidation and intensification of competition between cities, regions, it becomes necessary to implement a strategy to develop a city brand for it to advance to

the epicentre of global information space. Forming a new brand city / region should start from the idea that there is already an image, positive or negative, to be developed or changed. The image of the city is collective representation, the overview on it. The image is perceived subjectively and cannot be dissociated from the object represented. Once appeared, it is responsible for people's perceptions of a city. For example, Paris is associated with fashion, elegance, refinement. In other words, in approximately equal conditions of competition for economic and demographic characteristics, the difference will be made by the impression the city produces, memories, associations, intonation given by him. Often, the image developed independently, without being controlled by the administrative structures of leadership. The brand should represent advantages and unique features that highlight the city in the competitive environment. In other words, the brand is a unique perception about the specifics of a city.

Creation of a brand city, region - What does it mean?

Developing a city brand, region, allows directing image development, improving it if necessary. „A city brand is more than a slogan or campaign, he represents all thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations caused when a person is exposed to a logo, product, service or any other symbol." The brand is formed in order to promote a particular city. The brand is formed on the basis of information disseminated about the city, region, area, perceptions of tourists, ratings among other cities. The brand is based on a single image that appears to uttering the name of the city / region. About city branding is spoken very much. The city is an important unit of state economy and sometimes the world economy. No one will deny the influence of New York, London or Paris. This makes the brand of cities very important. A good brand is a tool to attract attention and then money. Competition for investment, information flows, talented teachers, doctors, managers, students, tourists. In a country where population declines for most cities, it becomes a fight for survival, for goods, capital, labour. Rules of modern society have changed, access to information and new technologies equalize chances of each city to enter into the rush for economic success.

Brand of city / region is perceived through the unique characteristics.

Conclusions

The term "regional brand" (city brand, local brand) is a relatively new term in marketing, and its interest is manifested in this proposal by reference to the regionalization of Romania. The challenge of scientific approach will be to identify peculiarities and specificity of a geographical area

in order to promote it against the background of globalization, both nationally and at European level.

Regarding the studies conducted so far, a first observation is that this concept is one Neological, appeared a little while compared to the first signs of occurrence of general marketing, for which the literature provides few opportunities for comparison between materials. This represents a consequence of the fact that depending on the place and the reason developing a brand study locally, at a zone level or regional, each researcher has addressed a certain segment of interest, most of them studying the tourist part of the zone.

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