

About The Romanian Way of Branding

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Abstract

To build a brand in Romania is not an easy or accomplished task. All the attempts after 1990 failed as they offered too general and unspecific features conveying no meaning about the country and its people. The present contribution mainly comments upon the campaign for Sibiu as a cultural capital in 2007. Although quite a long period passed and another Romanian city will have another chance in 2021, nothing seems to be improved. In 2007, the strategy was not coherent in its readability, listenability and visual presentation as a persuasive presentation of Romania. Too many foreign themes, subjects and structures were mixed up neglecting Romanian specificity or imposing an external perspective in which the target market cannot be found. No matter how well is crafted or superbly presented your message/brand, its communication value is defined by its own unique context.

Keywords: brand, Romania, icon, strategy, culture.

JEL: Z1, M37

1. Introduction

The word *brand* has no perfect equivalent in the Romanian language; it is used as such. Unfortunately, not only the words are “borrowed”, but the logos, logotypes, outdoor panels, icons, taglines, graphic signatures prove to be as well mere mimicry or less inspired variants of the European and American patterns. At the first go-off, for example, the brand of our country tries, in a naïve and mimetic modality, to render the common shape of waves, sun, mountains, using the same colors (blue, yellow, green, and red) as those met in the brands of Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Spain etc. This means that our country is included in the paradigm of the so-called holiday destinations (Gombrich, 1973; Adorno, 2006). Getting closer and observing the details, anyone may see a symbolic, better said a rather stylized cut-out of a statue (Cyprus), of the Maltese Cross (Malta), of the specific volute of an Ionic Greek column, of the solar symbol taken from the famous Spanish painter Joan Miró (Spain) – the tagline “Everything under the sun” connotes the same acceptance, etc. The shape of the letters goes after the peculiar alphabet of the country or the typical handwriting (Edeline, Klinkenberg & Minguet, 1992; Adamson, 2007). Taking into account the logotype for Romania, we observe the annoying iteration of the semantic chain *sea- mountains-sun-leaf* using the national colors, which is very predictable. In all these examples, if you imagine the national specificity as a circle and the efforts to establish a mark for tourism easy to remember as another circle, we observe a big distance in between highlighting the incapacity to reveal a few peculiar Romanian structures. During the latest decades, there were quite many, but failing tentatives.

2. Building a brand

All the first attempts to create a brand were far away from the real Romanian specificity and had no narrator from inside (Klein, 2006; Oliver, 2007). The country is presented almost exclusively from a touristic point of view, and it looks rather as a “cheap” and alike holiday location. The Romanian endeavor did not prove to be as successful as that of Spain, especially after the Football Championship (1982), the Olympic Games or the International Exhibition from Seville (1992). We choose Spain as a comparison-item because these countries gave many political, linguistic and historical features in common. All Spanish events were very well organized and they could improve the perception of the national identity. We mention some other important contributing elements as well: positive economic and political changes; the adhesion to the European Union in 1986; persuasive campaigns for powerful national companies (Repsol, Telefonica, Union Fenosa, etc.); the adornment

and modernization of the main cities (Barcelona, Bilbao), nevertheless Almodovar's self-ironical and tragic-comical artistic movies. In fact, the Spanish rebranding has been a victory, and the interchange of the welcome taglines („Passion for Life”, „Bravo Spain!”). Nowadays Spain is justly considered a most desirable place for holiday, a beautiful and secure state, a cultural capital of Europe in all seasons. In 2002, the Spanish government in association with The National Institute of Tourism (Turespaña) founded „Spain Marks” in order to promote the national spiritual values. Even the Spanish people have a better opinion of their own country and are proud to face the world, which is a very important exponent of the outside credibility and the capacity to turn the people out. Again, Spain succeeded via liberalism as in the 18th century.

Hannah Arendt, Heidegger's disciple, would have no trouble unpacking this strange paradox which is obviously close to Ulysses'. The famous hero is ignorant of his birth, does not seem to know who he is, until he meets with himself through the tale of his story. For Arendt, it comes from the fact that the category of personal identity postulates *Alterity* as necessary. Even before another can render tangible the identity of someone by telling her/his/its story, many others must be indeed spectators of the constitutive exposure of the very same identity to their gaze. In other words, a human being, a country, etc. is unique and shows to be such from the very moment it is exposed. This is why identity corresponds to the question “Who?” put to each newcomer. “Who are you?” The urge toward self-display by which living things or countries fit themselves into a world of appearances, makes of identity an *in nato* exposure of the Who to the gaze and to other questions. In the general exhibitionist spectacle of brands, *Appearing* cannot be the superficial phenomenon; it has to reveal the uniqueness, intimate and true essence. The expositive and the relational character are thus indistinguishable. Everybody needs a “story” to become aware of its significance. Otherwise *No One* is the name of each country/person trying to mislead Polyphemus.

The campaign organized for the Romanian city, Sibiu, as European Cultural Capital in 2007, might have acted better for our country and, partially, it was a kind of success depicting faithfully and closer the local specificity, but unfortunately not that of the nation in general. Quite highly advertised in Western Europe, Sibiu has partly managed to show a more convincing and eloquent “image” of Romania. Transilvania or Ardeal, as this region of the country is called (from the etymologic point of view, completely different meanings), takes everything for granted due to the fact that it was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire for a long period of time and the local inhabitants

had a rich experience living together with people of German, Hungarian, and Austrian origin. We are going to analysis some of the main components of the campaign in order to prove our statement.

a) The tagline “Normal Sibiu/Normally Sibiu” demonstrates this kind of assurance and it was used in the campaign of the GAV/Sholz & Friends Agency (released by the national TV channels). Is it endorsed by the photos and images as well? If we pay attention to the young couple’s faces and attitude, we reach the conclusion that they may be from any town or country (“Normally Paris/London/Prague”, etc). The surrounding objects have no local sign and even worse; they look improbable in Romanian settings – the phone, the bottle of champagne, the table itself with the glasses in a coffee-house or restaurant, the buildings and the street, the brick wall, the traffic-lights – of course, at this point of our analysis, we disregard their evident symbolic value;

b) The tagline of the event The Book Fest (“Sibiul citește altfel/Sibiu reads otherwise/Grenzenlos – Anders lesen”) tries to convey the same message admitted by the mayor himself, Klaus Johannis: to render an international atmosphere, to analysis life, but “to run away from life”. The young man reading on the lounge chair in front of a bird’s eye view assuming to be one from Sibiu seems a piece of a puzzle not fitting with the rest. It’s a pity that this kind of activity is not a Romanian habit, at least and less and less nowadays. The outdoor panel aimed to offer an example, but the national identity does not exist. The panoramic view of the city is hardly recognizable even for a native. The outstanding tower with a clock might be from Sighișoara, Brașov or other several cities, and it is not at all characteristic to the genuine Romanian architecture (e.g Brâncoveanu’s style, the architecture of the original wood gates in Maramureș, etc.). Judging according to the persuasive goal of advertising, it headed a certain category of citizens. More than two thirds of the population felt attracted and agreed with this cultural program meant for the best. But we must not forget that the most important effect had to be the economic profit and a success in building-up the tourism-structure. Statistical data show that the first one was achieved without having any losses (in Graz, Austria, for example) and the second one brought a little bit more people in Sibiu (an augmentation of 20% which is still modest and not very convincing).

c) The graphical signature has two components. If we look at the first one, with a drawn stag on the left-right corner of the promoting materials, one may say that it is a typical beautiful animal living in the Romanian forests, but all the Romanian people will think at once at a similar

sign – that for the International Festival “Cerbul de aur/ The Golden Stag” taking place in Braşov every year. The stars around the stag are more predictable and too often used as they became the classic symbol of the European Union. The second graphical element combines two letters trying to build the third one - it may be interpreted in many ways: it stands for the letter “S” (from “Sibiu”)/two letters “C” of the word “city”- City of Culture/Cities of Culture, it symbolizes union/solidarity as we may observe two human beings in a kind of embrace or, assuming that they sit at a table, at least they touch themselves. It is an above perspective well done and it has a pleasant chromatic design.

d) The other outdoor panels also promote the portrait of Baron Samuel von Brukenthal who founded the well-known museum, the concert of a Viennese orchestra, the opening of a Slovak exhibition of paintings at the Town Hall, a day of popular fest, with the tagline „Europe is singing and dancing”, during the most adequate month of the year – May, etc. All of them tell the same successful story of other European countries except Romania.

We will try to reach a conclusion of this brief and selective presentation. It was finally a success for Romania. It endues talents and a professional approach of the campaigns. All the 337 projects and 2062 events involved in Sibiu campaign (theater performances, street carnival, rock concerts, The Days of Israelian Films, colloquies, motorcycles rallies, fireworks, etc.) certified, in most of the cases, equilibrium and a choice of good taste, even a „battle” won by the city against the monotony and the current dull life. The infrastructure was improved, it revealed itself as an opportunity for investments, more people had the chance to find a job (an increase of 12,7% of the employees), the educational and cultural buildings amongst other institutions were refurbished or redecorated, and 62,4% appreciated the quality of the program as good or very good. So, it seems to be the story of a Romanian adventure at a pretty high level. A close look reveals a few weak points. Our opinion is that the keyword of 2007 - Sibiu – European Cultural City was not „Normal”, but „Altfel/Otherwise”. All the plans and activities aimed to illustrate a western, modern and very relaxing way of life. It is very true that culture played a leading role facilitated as much as possible. Let’s remember the tagline, „Europe is singing and playing”, the image of the man reading a book on top of a hill near the city or the graphic signature of the joining people; all these delude and mystify. This was not meant to be a country brand campaign. It succeeded to determined *grosso modo* the perception of a town almost similar to a large number of others from Europe and it also indulged the young generation beside

the other citizens (Romanian or foreign people) the idea that this is the national standard of life and cultural implication. The design, the conceptual fantasy, the appropriate administrative measures offered a deserved joy and fame to the city. Regarding our topic, we have to add that there is only a small overlapping of the circle standing for national identity and the one allotted to tourism, particular mentality which cannot be found in another country. Romania must prove that it has this for real, not only a potential value performed in a big rush and for a short period of time. After 2007, Sibiu attained a marketing success failing to represent the country. On an imaginary map of Romania, it is cut out and it seemed to get closer to the Western Europe. It was a holiday for all the Romanian people during a whole year.

The next campaigns for the country or for a city to be a cultural capital were kept in the political shadow of interests. Also, all of them lack sincerity next to genuineness/honesty. In the European Union, true reconciliation and respect for each nation cannot be attained without these basic feelings. The intercultural demagogy is one of the worst tools in the hands of the administrative and political agents (Teodorescu & Calin, 2015). To create only cultural “shop-windows” for the people abroad is a circumstantial solution which unfortunately encourages national arrogance and historic revanche. Romania and the Romanian society must settle out, with honesty, the problem of the necessity of changing mentality and the one of its values which we claim for.

First of all, we have presented the common way to promote a country which has poor results in revealing national identity. Taking into account Sibiu-campaign, we must state the fact that Transilvania, the region where Sibiu is located, has always had, all along our history, a brittle place being considered both as an outpost of Alterity and an idyllic, wonderful and ideal space. So, all the events of the campaign for Sibiu underlined these preconceptions. We have to remind, although you all know, of course, that Romania has many regions: Muntenia, Moldova, Dobrogea, Maramures, Banat, Oltenia; it does not consist only of Transilvania. Where are all these regions? Where is the country with its past, traditions and spiritual values? Sibiu and Transilvania have the monopoly. The other parts of Romania are not present and they represent almost two thirds of the territory and of population.

3. Conclusion

In the above presented campaign, the brand builders could reach neither the essence of an idea nor a meaningful and simple, specific national feature. The imagery and texts must evoke Romania beyond themselves. The conveyed

ideas interact with so many useless foreign items so that they all seem to be alike, lacking the core of branding-activity – to keep the promise to introduce Romania to the world and nothing is worse than unsuccessfully deliver the pledge.

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Târgul de carte Sibiu
Hermannstädter Buchmesse



Sibiul citește *altfel*

Grenzenlos - Anders lesen



25-28 Octombrie 2007
Pavilionul central, Piața Unirii, Sibiu

Programul Sibiu Capitală Culturală Europeană se
afiliază la proiectul european de dezvoltare durabilă.
Programul este realizat de Primăria Sibiu, Capitală
Culturală Europeană 2007, în colaborare cu Consiliul
Municipal Sibiu, Hermannstädter Buchmesse și
Consiliul Cultural Sibiu, în calitate de parteneri media
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