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NATION BRANDING IN
TRANSITIONAL ROMANIA

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Master's Thesis

in

Culture, Communication and Globalisation

Aalborg University Denmark

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May 2014

Number of standard pages: 80

Abstract

In a world where countries are in constant competition for attention, respect and credibility, a positive and strong nation brand can provide a crucial advantage. If however, the country in question is already crippled by a dark past and self-deprecating population, nation branding becomes a necessity, rather than a theoretical pastime. The 20th century was marked by successive transformations, which led to political, economic and global changes in society, as well as a new global order and changes in the internal policy of countries. At the same time, the expansion of globalization, as a political, cultural, social and economic phenomenon, has amplified these changes which, through technology and accessibility of information have extended to the level of the entire globe. Therefore, the entire communication process has been reconfigured, has become more instantaneous and reaching larger audiences than the 20th century could have imagined.

This paper focuses on transitional Romania, the post-communist Eastern European country that has yet to develop a coherent nation branding framework, in spite of its frequent attempts at implementing a successful strategy. The author has synthesized knowledge on the issue and hopes to provide a foundation for future research, in the related disciplines, with implications discussed for the future of the country's national brand. The first chapter discusses the current status of knowledge on the subject, along with a discussion of the problem and purpose statement, which predicate the research questions. The second chapter critically presents the methodology behind the thesis, presenting the research design from which the theoretical framework benefits, as well as stating the research questions themselves. The third chapter explores the theory on nation branding, national identity and other aspects relevant to this chapter, which will be later applied in the case study on Romanian nation branding. The fourth chapter will contain an empirical and historical study of the Romanian nation branding activities developed so far, in the context of transition from communism. The final chapter contains the discussion on the theories and aspects of Romanian nation branding presented previously in the paper. It will provide answers to the problem formulation, research questions as well as thoughts and recommendations for the future.

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Introduction

In the context of the globalization process dominating the 21st century, the world has seen a turning point for the public-oriented approach and its influence in fields such as culture, politics and social life (Scholte, 1997). Nation branding activities have therefore become necessary in the global arena, for purposes of attracting tourists, investors and general positivity from foreigners, with differences arising in expense, strategy and coordination. In this context, Central and Eastern European countries have been engaging in a set of marketing and branding strategies, designed to improve the active promotion of a nation's assets and attributes, in order to attract tourists, investors, talent and to better portray its image in the world (Kaneva, 2012). This technique has proven itself particularly useful and interesting for younger or smaller countries which do not inherently benefit from sufficient media and global attention, or which only possess limited resourced required for the raising of the level of awareness and international prestige of the state, by competing in the international arena (Budnitskiy, 2012, p.7).

Romania is a semi-presidential republic, member of the European Union since 2007, which has been dealing with the process with marketing itself, an action defined as "the conscious and planned practice of signification and representation" (Firat & Venkatesh 1993, p. 246) and with developing a strategic plan using its image and identity. So far, actions taken by Romania and its leaders have not met expectations in the era of globalization, where the competition of standing out is critical in achieving economic, political or social objectives (Kaneva and Popescu, 2011). Almost 25 years of transition from a highly centralized communist regime towards a free market-oriented one have imposed various obstacles in the development of a nation brand, in spite of the medium to large amount of funding spent in this interest (Sepi, 2013).

A fundamental economic and political restructuring has been the definitional experience of the former communist countries of the CEE (Central and Eastern Europe), which have been seeking to replace centrally planned economies with market ones and one-party systems with multi-party democracies, ever since 1989. It can therefore be asserted that these countries, which include Romania, are currently acknowledged to be in a process of transition, a fact which has generated considerable interest over time from the academic arena (Buckley and Ghauri 1994; Estrin 1994; Lavigne 1995; Turnock 1997).

Romania's past is still haunting its present, affected by aspects such as the eternally unstable internal political medium, mostly caused by an inherent struggle for power and the "prioritization" of self-gain over public interest (Cotîrlea, 2013, p.181). David Gertner, professor at the Lubin School of Business at "Peace" University believes that "production can be stopped, products may suffer several major changes, can be withdrawn, re-launched, repositioned or replaced with top quality products. Places (destinations, countries, nations) are not characterized by these attributes; problems related to image, in this case, require years to be resolved" (Frost, 2013, p. 15).

This paper will analyse the Romanian attitude, strategies and actions regarding national branding and identity. It attempts to analyse the way Romania has presented itself, through communication campaigns over the years and its efforts in promoting the country as a touristic destination, investment opportunity and general reliable nation. The nation branding phenomenon will be analysed as a process in itself, with functional components, as well as the result of a process of transition.

Relevance and Aims

Relevance of the study can be established both through the author's presence in the midst of the Romanian social environment, as well as through the position occupied within an event management company that directly collaborates with the National Tourism Authority. Given the struggle of emerging from post-communism far away from the bitter communist perception (Kaneva and Popescu 2011), the nation branding abilities and strategies of a post-communist nation such as Romania is of particular interest. Moreover, this author has previously been exposed to the nation branding efforts in the diplomatic environment (through a position occupied at the Embassy of Romania in the Czech Republic), which have spiked my interest in the field.

In order to develop an overview of the challenges faced by a struggling country such as Romania in the context of transition and because of the complexity of the branding concepts, upon writing the paper the author has studies works from fields such as marketing, communication, PR and history. This topic is relevant and actual in the international arena, especially since the country has been experiencing an identity crisis (Kaneva and Popescu 2011) for the past quarter of a century and requires an incentive towards achieving its

objectives and building Romania as a brand in the right direction. Moreover, a nation brand can exert influence on areas such as business, trade, tourism, diplomatic and cultural relation, and can influence the development of national identity, value and status (Anholt, 2007).

Following the fall of communism, Romania launched several large-scale campaigns, has tried to rebrand itself 3 times in the last 5 years, as a reaction to a generally negative global image (Sepi, 2013). However, the touristic brand of Romania has not been managed in an organized, consistent and effective manner, funds were not managed correctly, communication between organizations was not established and priorities were not established, as it will be presented further in the thesis. Almost all attempts have been powerless, not backed up by a comprehensive branding system, with a "precarious gap emerging between the reality of everyday life in Romania and how it is perceived by the outside world" (Pavel, 2012, p. 899). It is apparent that transitional circumstances dictate that there is still much to hide or cover in order to be able to positively represent Romania and fight against the half-formed and negative perceptions and also to differentiate from the rest of the former soviet bloc countries.

In time, it has become apparent that two major streams have emerged in the research on nation branding: individual descriptions of high profile countries (Western Europe and North America) which possess an existing, clear and defined nation image, or, in a contrasting approach, the characterization of Central and Eastern European attempts at developing nation brands. To be even more specific for the latter case, the development of nation branding has so far focused mostly on tourism promotion, with "destination branding" being used as a frequent depiction of marketing a place (Marzano and Scott, 2009; Bell, 2008; Peirce and Ritchie, 2007; Murphy et al., 2007; Pike, 2007; Henderson, 2007; Gertner et al., 2006), in spite of other aspects such as exports and investments having been proven to benefit the improvement of country reputation (Suh and Khan, 2003; Tesfom et al., 2004; Arregle et al., 2009).

Romanian authorities have used contrasting approaches and strategies in their attempt of developing a strong tourism brand. As previously stated, some countries only clearly brand themselves for tourism purposes, so much so that it becomes synonymous with nation branding. It is this researcher's opinion that it has steadily become so in Romania, which serves as a great obstacle in the country's potential, as it limits opportunities and does not comply with necessities of building a nation brand, and is therefore worth studying.

While traditionally associated with corporations, products or services, today branding has exceeded its traditional boundaries and is now being applied to people, institutions, places, cities, political entities and even nations. This paper will address the complexity of the creation, development, employment and positioning of Romania's nation brand. The multidimensional character of the country itself, the difference in interests of the stakeholders, the difference between the theoretical and decision-making processes and the consensus of the involved community, associated with the necessary financial support are all part of the elaborate development of a nation brand (Pavel, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that this research has two functions: a theoretical one, by establishing a rigorous knowledge of the country brand and image, allowing for the possibility of future research and education of society; and a practical one, which can be applied, by providing recommendations in the final chapter, for the establishment and implementation of a comprehensive strategy, based on an inter-institutional network of government, education, scientific institutions, mass-media, NGOs, etc.

The results of this study may therefore be usable for an eventual improvement of Romania's image, for the responsible development of differentiated strategies in domains which retain responsibility and influence over Romania's nation brand (governmental and non-governmental organizations, educational and scientific institutions, mass-media, tourism agencies, etc.)

I.   Methodology

This section will outline the methodology of the research study while, at the same time, justifying the chosen approach in order to study the Romanian experience with nation branding. As this chapter will show, in order to accomplish the aforementioned endeavour, a qualitative research strategy has been deemed most appropriate, the details of which are to be discussed further in this chapter. This section will also present the reasoning behind the use of content analysis within a qualitative research strategy, a historical research design on the Romanian case study, which will allow the research to fall under the epistemological position of interpretivism, an ontological position of constructionism and a hermeneutical point of view.

From an epistemological point of view, this research can be attributed to the research methodology of interpretivism. Following the belief that "social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished [constructed] by social actors" (Bryman 2008, p. 19), the data collected from sources is to be subjected and analysed according to the theoretical stance of the research, in an effort to acquire a better understanding of the studied topic. The text analysis skills I have developed during my Bachelor and Master's degree have allowed me to seek an in-depth and thorough interpretation, while at the same time acknowledging that my understanding of the data will be subjective. It should however be stated that the aim of this research is in no way that of reaching an objective understanding of the nation branding of Romania, but rather to study the subject through a social constructivist point of view, supporting Finn Collin's statement that there is "no superior, trans-historical, and cross-cultural standpoint from which one can examine human reality" (Collin in Collin & Køppe, 2006, p. 269).

Appropriate methods and techniques have therefore been used to collect and process the empirical data, as well as observe, sort, compare and analyse according to the relevant theoretical elements. As mentioned, this chapter will frame the elements of Romania's brand and image promotion into the qualitative thematic, through a social constructivist qualitative research, exploring attitudes, behaviours and experiences. With the data mediated through the human instrument, rather than inventories or machines, this is a more personal approach, more suitable for the study of nation branding in transitional Romania, as it is based on an

understanding constructed by individuals through their interaction with their surrounding world (Merriam, 2002).

Further, this research falls under the ontological position of social constructionism, "the ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman 2008, p. 19), meaning that interpretivists, in contrast to positivists, believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000). Therefore, it can be asserted that this research falls under the guidelines of a hermeneutical approach, holding that there are no ultimate truths in the interpretation of the Romanian attempts of constructing a nation brand. Moreover, according to Mouton and Marais (1990, p. 12), I as an individual researcher "hold explicit beliefs", meaning that the empirical results of this study cannot be considered a purely objective fact, but rather as providing a multitude of possible interpretations.

The social constructivist approach proposed in this thesis for the study of the nation brand promotion facilitates a profound analysis of the process, through which the actors involved contribute to the social construction of what is representative for their country and their national identity in transition.

It should also be mentioned that during the development of this research paper, the author has also been exposed to the guidelines of the "hermeneutical circle", addressing several issues regarding the nature of human understanding. The justification for the appropriateness of such an approach can be found in previous research regarding the interpretation of qualitative data (Hirschman 1990, Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989, 1990). Productive or projective hermeneutics, as the iterative interpretation and reinterpretation of data, towards developing a sense of "whole", state that the role of the interpreter is a critical one (Nicholson, 1994). Thus, from an ontological point of view, the study of Romanian nation branding in transition through the veil of hermeneutics reflects a constructivist approach, sustaining that that the interpretation "is not simply there waiting to be discovered, [but] is constructed in the process of reading" (Connolly and Keutner, 1988, p. 17).

In accordance with the epistemological and ontological positions previously described, the data was reflected upon through qualitative content analysis, on the basis of

studies, interviews, online media and editorial sources in general, with contributions from both foreign and local authors.

In accordance with Krippendorff (2004) and Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998), this researcher believes that content analysis is not limited to simply the written word, because other forms of communication (i.e. verbal and visual) can carry symbols which can be investigated through content analysis, with the specific mention that visual communication which is appropriate for study of Romanian nation branding through its efforts in advertising could include "photos, graphics or display ads" (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 1998, p. 24).

As typical of qualitative research, the data is "richer", more time consuming and less generalizable. The assessment of nation branding in transitional Romania therefore happened through what Bryman (2004) called "probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents" and that it "comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed" (p.392). To be a bit more specific, he defines qualitative content analysis in the following way:

"An approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. There is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analyzed (and the categories derived from it) appeared." (Bryman, 2004, p.542)

The general study of nation branding can apply itself to a variety of research designs, which is the overall strategy of integrating various components of the study in order to effectively address the research problems and/or questions, through the collection, measurement and analysis of data.

However, as previous research has shown, "the dominant research method for both nation branding and public diplomacy remains the country specific case study based on document analysis and interviews with policy-makers or branding practitioners sometime in a comparative context." (Szondi, 2008, p. 32)

Therefore, due to the individual nature of the study at hand, which focuses on transitional Romania's experience with the field of nation branding, this researcher has found the case study research method to be appropriate for the purposes of this thesis. The in-depth study of the particular problem this paper approaches would benefit from the case study

research design, due to an existing need to narrow the field of study, when there is a particular theoretical model which can be applied to the nation branding phenomenon in transitional Romania. Moreover, a case study research design can only be beneficial for the social constructionist and hermeneutical approach of this present study, due to the mutual emphasis on context, as it has been previously stated that that "to reduce a phenomenon to its 'basic' elements or to remove the elements from the larger context is to eliminate much of what is meaningful about the phenomenon" (Malm, 1993). Adding to Malm's statement are Johnston et al. (1999) , who write: "Case study research consists of a detailed investigation that attempts to provide an analysis of the context and processes in the phenomenon under study" (Johnson et al. 1999, p. 203), and Bonoma (1985) who states how "many issues of interest to marketers cannot be studied outside the context in which they naturally occur" (Bonoma, 1985, p. 202). This is in line with the social constructivist standpoint which means this research regards social phenomena as something that can be best understood by taking historical, social and geographical context into consideration (Collin in Collin & Køppe, 2006), which is why I find it important to study Romania's nation branding in the context of its transition from communism.

Moreover, the study of Romania's transitional evolution in the field of nation branding following the fall of the communist regime requires the use of the historical research method. The "systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects, or trends of these events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events" can be used for "reconstructing the past systematically and objectively by collecting, evaluating, verifying and synthesizing to establish facts and reach defensible conclusions."(Powell, 1997, p. 47) through the use of secondary sources, a variety of documentary evidence in the form of logs, articles, records, reports and archives, which are will construct the data basis for the documentary analysis of nation branding in transitional Romania. The data were collected through direct observation of relevant electronic and print sources. Other arguments in favor of the historical research method are as follows: its suitability for trend analysis, its unobtrusive nature, the contextual nature of the background generated by historical records and the lack of interaction between the researcher and the subject, which could end up affecting the findings. (Savitt, 1980; Gall, 2007) The empirical data was therefore selected following a thorough process of research, which gives it validity, as it was not randomly selected, but in a representative manner.

The benefits of using such a design include allowing both the researcher and the reader to reach a more positive understanding of the complexity of the nation branding phenomenon, through the analysis of a limited scope and sequence of events, in relation to the problem formulation and its implications in a contemporary, real-life situation.

As any methodological research method would, this approach has its limitations. The lowered chance of establishing generalizability and reliability stem from lack of facilitation for the assessment of cause and effect relationships and findings which would only apply to a particular case (Yin, 2003). Regarding historical method limitations, included are guaranteeing the validity and authenticity of all sources, the time consuming nature of interpreting historical sources, the representation of the original author's bias and interpretation in the secondary sources, lack of internal validity and the acknowledgement of gaps in historical documentation (Savitt, 1980; Gall, 2007).

Conducting historical research can be summarized in six steps, according to Charles Busha and Stephen Harter:

1. the recognition of a historical problem or the identification of a need for certain historical knowledge.

2. the gathering of as much relevant information about the problem or topic as possible.

3. if appropriate, the forming of hypothesis that tentatively explain relationships between historical factors.

4. the rigorous collection and organization of evidence, and the verification of the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources.

5. the selection, organization, and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence, and the drawing of conclusions.

6. the recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative. (Busha and Harter, 1980, p. 81)

The reasoning behind choosing this particular research method over all others is that it allows us to discuss past and present events in the context of present circumstances, in order to reflect and provide solutions to current issues, by answering questions such as "Where have we come from, where are we, who are we and where are we going?".

Accordingly, I, the researcher, have found myself to be subjectively immersed in the subject matter. I am to provide a complete and detailed chronological description of the

specific controversies surrounding Romanian nation branding, during which the design emerges as the study unfolds, using the researched as the data gathering instrument. Further, it aims to offer a critical discussion of the identity narrative emerging in the same context.

Depending on the relationship between theory and research, a paper can function in a deductive or an inductive approach, or somewhere in the middle. Firstly, this research has been designed according to an inductive approach, meaning that the data was collected in order to generalize to theories, in accordance with analysis and discussion. (Saunders et al., 2007 in Cretu, 2011) Secondly, this research has been designed according to deductive research, as it examines Romania's nation branding attempts in the context of transition, according to Anholt's theories. Since a mix of both approaches is used to generate the final results of this thesis, this research will finally fall into the abductive approach, which includes both inductive and deductive.

As previously mentioned, an initial aim of this research could be an overview of the development of nation branding in Romania, from the perspective of a transitional region. Therefore, the following research questions have been formulated to approach the problem formulation:

Q1: *In what ways has Romania faired with nation branding in the context of its transition from its communist past?*

Sub question: *What issues arise as a result of transition involvement in this process?*

Q2: *How has national identity been involved within Romania's nation branding strategies?*

To reiterate, this research will be following a social-constructivist qualitative research method, with a case study and historical research method, and will gather data through content analysis on relevant documents in order to provide an adequate response to the problem formulation.

Limitations

This thesis is affected by the limitation of studying nation branding only at a governmental level. Therefore, the corporate level have been excluded, with brands such as Dacia, Jolidon, e-MAG and Mario Bădescu and Anastasia Soare's contribution to the impact of the Romanian brand not being included. The research is focused at the highest level, the governmental one, as it considers them directly responsible for the country's transition in post-communism.

Moreover, since this thesis has only been developed by one writer, who has went through the process of qualitative writing (outlining research questions, collecting and analysing relevant data, finding theoretical frameworks, discussing findings and conclusions), the trustworthyness and authenticity of this paper has suffered some damage. Therefore, the validity and reliability concepts have also suffered, and there can be no discussion of absolute truths.

Further, this researcher is aware of the criticism on social constructivism, which states that it focuses too much on relativism, and is too dependent on different contexts, and difficult to generalize. I can acknowledge however that Romania falls into a category of countries which have gone through communism together, and have emerged from it as different, unique entities. I consider this, along with the use of academically recognized literature, to make the research more valid, by approaching the data in a critical manner, but with open-mindedness and transparency, in order to make the resulted data more reliable and accessible.

Regarding generalizability, this research falls under Janice M. Morse statement that "[…] generalization was not the purpose of qualitative inquiry" (Morse, 1999, p. 5), rather a deep understanding of the specific context of Romanian nation branding. Morse does however state how qualitative research is generalizable to some extent, as is this research, which could prove useful in projects with a similar topic or research problem, which would be considered a more analytical generalization.

II.   Theory

This section is devoted to the exploration of relevant theories, in order to gain a better understanding of the nation branding efforts of transitional Romania. Aspects such as branding, nation branding and national identity will be approached in order to build a framework upon which to analyse the collected data.

Neoliberalism has allowed us to perceive the world as a global marketplace, responding to the needs of nations of becoming visible, expanding from their initial economic concepts. "The world (the international system) can be understood as a large and complex communication network, in which the media cannot be treated in isolation" (Kunczik, 1997, p. 12). In fact, what these national actors are fighting for is *soft power*, a concept developed by Joseph Nye (1991), regarding the changes in international relations and inter-state relationships in which military, economic and political power have lost relevance in comparison to the emergence of the importance of a good image. Although initially developed in the field of international relations, the concept spread fast and was taken over by the business fields, such as public relations, marketing and branding.

Governments have taken notice of the developments in this field and have created institutions specialized in the communication and promotion of a country outside its boundaries. The United States of America had the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs[1], France had *l'Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques* (1922) which became the French Institute, *British Council* in 1934 and the Goethe Institute în 1951.Central and Eastern Europe also took notice with Szondi (2008) mentioning institutions in Hungary, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Poland (p. 295).

The commercialization of places has caught the academic public's attention as early as the 1980's (Ashworth and Voogd, 1988). A considerable amount of literature has since been dedicated to the complexity of place (countries, nations, regions, cities) branding. For example, while Anholt (2007) speaks of nation branding in the context of competitive identity, Gilboa (2008) highlights public diplomacy, while Szondi (2008) claims that international public relations are what helps the analysis of country reputation management. Not as easily branded and marketed as commodities, "places do not suddenly acquire a new identity thanks to a slogan or a memorable logo" (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005), and

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[1] Source - http://eca.state.gov/about-bureau-0/history-and-mission-eca/, accessed on 19 May 2014.

require more than simplistic communications, which cannot themselves substitute essential policies. Anholt (2005) also approaches this subject, arguing that, while advertising and PR campaigns are useful, a more substantial effort is required in order to develop a coherent strategy.

The whole idea behind marketing a place would be to increase its value and presence in the eyes of the world. This can be obtained through the creation of a brand, a process which has four main reasons for implementation:

"...(1) products, services and locations have become so alike that they can no longer differentiate themselves by their quality, reliability and other basic traits. Branding adds emotion and trust to these 'products', thereby offering clues that make consumers' choices somewhat easier; (2) this emotional relationship between brand and consumer ensures loyalty to the brand; (3) by creating an aspiration lifestyle, branding offers a kind of Ersatz for ideologies and political programmes that have lost their relevance; and (4) the combination of emotions, relationships and lifestyle (values) allows a brand to charge a price premium for their products, services and locations, which would otherwise hardly be distinguishable from generics." (van Ham, 2002, p. 251)

Branding, on the other hand, is defined as "a product, but one that adds other dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need" (Keller, 2003). Therefore, branding also involves the development of an emotional connection with consumers, which when applied to locations (in the sense of countries, nations, regions and cities), concerns increasing awareness and producing "desirable associations to construct a favourable image to attract either visits or businesses or both" (Dumbrăveanu, p. 41). It is therefore a deliberate, unique process, comprised of symbols, values and attributes, in a holistic and creative manner.

Authors Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) have made a distinction between brand identity, brand positioning, and brand image as factors of a multidimenstional brand, which can be illustrated as follows:

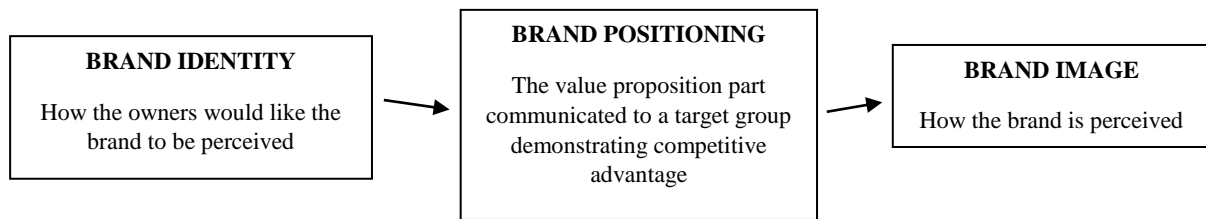| BRAND IDENTITY

How the owners would like the brand to be perceived | → | BRAND POSITIONING

The value proposition part communicated to a target group demonstrating competitive advantage | → | BRAND IMAGE

How the brand is perceived |

Fig. 1. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005)

It can therefore be seen how important brand positioning is, or the way a brand (in this case a nation) stressed upon values and features which can distinguish it from others, allowing it to occupy a niche.

Marketing a place can only be considered successful if and when the two most important parameters achieve satisfaction, the internal and the external stakeholders, through the "planning procedure concerning the satisfaction of the needs of target markets" (Kotler et al., 1999).

Anholt (2008) describes place branding as centered around five aspects: clear communication with the outside world; portraying reputation through an image; managing said reputation as an asset through equity; having a set purpose, which implies dynamic brand management; using innovation in order to influence the international public opinion.

Nation Branding

Nation branding as a notion has its origins in the product-evaluation research developed shortly after the world wars under the name of "country-of-origin." The objective at that time was to avoid buying German products as much as possible, followed by the desire to "buy domestic" (in the 60s-70's). This aspect soon developed into what is now called place marketing, commonly used by regions (mostly cities), but which has steadily evolved into the possibility of marketing nations, treating them as brands and actively branding them.

Country image, on the other hand, has been frequently associated with the aspect of product evaluation, generating the country of origin land mark theory in 1987, which revealed, among other things, the complexity of the country of origin aspect, upon which the authors pointed to the need for further research (Papadopoulos et al., 1987). Although the COO research field is extremely thorough and usable in many cases, this thesis will not focus

on this particular area since "It is all in the eye of the consumer" (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006, pp. 63-93), and not much related to the broadcaster of the message itself.

Kotler is one of the researchers who has written extensively on the theories of place marketing and the marketing of nations (1993, 1997), referring to the possibilities of marketing for "places in trouble". In his works, the author stresses the need for global competition and ambition for these nations, with the occasional mention of COO and extended marketing theories. However, the works do not delve into the branding aspect, so they have not been deemed particularly useful for the purposes of this research.

In fact, it was Simon Anholt who first coined the "nation brand" expression in 1996, having become the leading authority on the management of national identity, reputation and image, as well as a consultant for nations in need. He has published extensively on the subject since then, having defined nation branding as "a concept involving a combination of the promotion of tourism, investment, and trade, plus public and cultural diplomacy", saying that countries should "have coordinated brand strategies in all of these areas" (Kahn, 2006). In this sense, Anholt developed the Nation Brands Index (NBI), using a public-opinion survey in order to judge countries on the basis of six criteria, which formed his "Nation Brand Hexagon". This tool can and will be part of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

"I first began to write about an idea I called Nation Branding in 1996. My original observation was a simple one: that the reputation of countries functions like the brand images of companies and that they are equally critical to the progress and prosperity of those countries" (Simon Anholt in Dinnie, 2008, p. 22).

By working together with the GfK Roper research company, Anholt has managed to produce an international measurement of national brand, according to six different dimensions: Exports, Governance, Culture and Heritage, People, Tourism, and Investment and Immigration. Each of them are explained accordingly in the Nation Brands Index slip-sheet as follows:

- *" Exports - The public's image of products and services from each country and the extent to which consumers proactively seek or avoid products from each country-of-origin.*
- *Governance - Public opinion about national government competency and fairness, as well as its perceived commitment to global issues such as peace and security, justice, poverty and the environment.*
- *Culture and Heritage - Global perceptions of each nation's heritage and appreciation for its contemporary culture, including film, music, art, sport and literature.*
- *People - The population's reputation for competence, openness and friendliness and other qualities such as tolerance.*
- *Tourism - The level of interest in visiting a country and the draw of natural and man-made tourist attractions.*
- *Investment and Immigration - The power to attract people to live, work or study in each country and how people perceive a country's quality of life and business environment".[2]*

This index can help member countries improve their brand image by detecting relevant issues and presenting them in an organized manner. During this research, it will be used as a framework to analyse the development of Romania's nation branding efforts in the context of transition.

Other terms used in the domain include geographical branding, place marketing, region marketing, city marketing, etc., event causing Anholt to repent and and modify his notion, but books and articles have continued to be published with the term nation branding in mind. Having slightly modified his concept, he refers to brand management as an approach of competitive identity as it ""[...] has more to do with national identity and the politics and economics of competitiveness than with branding as it is usually understood" (Anholt, 2007, p. xi). Other scholars, such as Fan and Dinnie have also written on pure or specific nation branding.

As adapted from the marketing domain's destination branding, nation branding focuses on defining or, in some cases, re-defining countries along well-defined concepts and messages that present the nation's most desirable characteristics. Its distinction from destination branding (also referred to as place branding in literature) also emerges from the promotion of its image as a whole, more than just a group of various places.

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[2] Source - http://marketing.gfkamerica.com/PlaceBranding_slipsheet.pdf, accessed on 19 May 2014.

What makes nation branding in the region be of interest is the fact that its practices here are "nested in the conditions of unique post-communist political cultures, where governments generally have limited credibility and where nationalist sentiments are often used to mobilize apathetic electorates." (Kulcsar and Yum, 2012, p. 194)

Romania has been struggling with its nation brand development since its emerging from communism. Despite the country's aspirations to the contrary, it still projects an image of darkness and backwardness, which is symbolically conflicted to the image it tries to instil in the Western mind and which it has attempted to portray in its campaign narratives (Kaneva, 2012). Alas, in spite to the continuous state of transition from communism, to a post-communist democracy, to candidate for the EU, to European Country, the people do not support or trust the government itself (*idem*).

Lately, however, there has been a rising interest for identifying answers not by questioning experts, but by seeking solutions in its history, the national psychology of its people and the status of Romanian culture and society. It is here where the aspect of national identity fits and why it will be developed next.

National Identity

Ever since the rise of nationalism in the 19t century, national identity has become a critical and debated issue in theoretical literature. A critical component of nation branding, this paper recognizes that national identity relies on the fact that "multiple and contested imaginations of the nation are possible" (Dzenovska, 2005, p. 174) and entails "'certain presuppositions about the world-as-it-is and the world-as-it-should-be" (*idem*). Moreover, it can be agreed that, due to today's liberalization of the media and increase in access for internal and external audiences, national identity can therefore be affected by an articulation with commercial images (Kenava and Popescu, 2011).

Romanian historian Neagu Djuvara has summarized the inheritance of the communist regime, which will be included in a personal translation of his work: "The most tragic legacy is that that half-century ruined our soul. A regime in which lying was raised to the rank of governance method, in which terror developed cowardness in most and reckless heroism in few, in which denouncement was considered a virtue, in which theft, not only from the goods of the state but also from those of a neighbour, has ended by appearing legitimate because of

deprivation and the example of deceiving coming from above, such a regime couldn't not leave deep marks on attitudes and behaviors. They are today a major obstacle in our integration in a new world" (2013, p. 343).

Moreover, from a constructivist perspective, Vintilă Mihăilescu (2013) reiterates how national identity is in itself a social construct: "After almost half a century of identity imposed through totalitarian discourse, Romanian society has tried, through a great part of its elites, a recomposition of identity through a defensive (re)identification of 'interwar Romania' and, more diffuse, with the 'good traditions' world. It could not – and could have not – replace a real 'country project', giving direction for the future, not only for the past" (p. 135). He goes on to highlight how it is the responsibility of the state to propose a vision for the development of the state, to reflect the specific of our country.

In transitional countries such as Romania, national identity serves as the starting point for the development of a nation brand, with campaign designers advised to develop an understanding of it and the way it should be synthesized within marketing and branding strategies. According to Jansen (2008) nation branding "selects, simplifies and deploys only those aspects of a nation's identity that enhance a nation's marketability" and therefore the identity has to be "forged through representational practices that are historically and socially conditioned, multi-layered and dispersed" (p. 122).

Because of such a direct correlation between nation branding and national identity, it should come as no surprise that "national identity plays a key role in nation branding. An awareness and understanding of the core features of national identity is a prerequisite for developing nation-branding campaigns, as the essence of any nation brand derives not only from the country's companies and brands but also from its culture in the widest sense- language, literature, music, sport, architecture and so on all embody the soul of a nation." (Dinnie, 2008, p. 111). Correlating this with the distinctiveness of nation brand across the globe, it can be asserted that while similarities between processes and strategies are on the rise, there is a clear differentiation between the nation brands themselves, which can be traced to the essence of the countries' national identities, to their varied cultural resources (Budnitskiy, 2012, p.17).

From a theoretical standpoint, Simon Anholt, a leading scholar in the field of nation branding, equates national identity with the nation brand, stating that the latter is merely a "tangible, robust, communicable and above all useful version" of the former. Furthermore,

"nation branding as a discourse delimits the boundaries of possible truth claims about national identity. It privileges the logic of value exchange, while concealing alternative possibilities for narrating the nation" (Kaneva, 2012, p. 12).
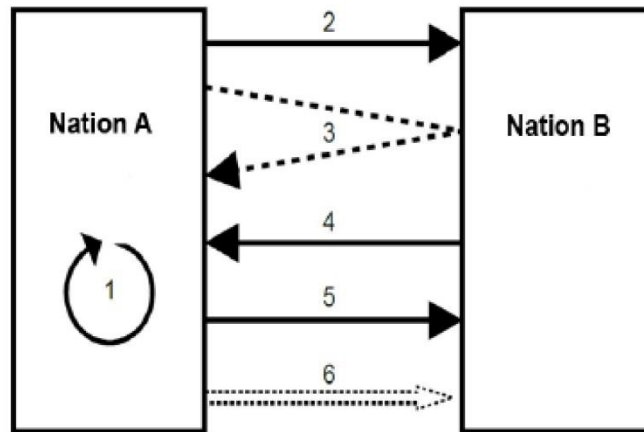

Figure 2

Source: Stock, F. (2009) "Identity, image and brand: A conceptual framework", *Public Diplomacy and Place Branding*, 5, pp. 118-125.

In Figure 2:

"1" is identified as national identity, the way nation A perceives itself;

"2" is the reference point, the way nation A perceives nation B;

"3" is the construed imagine, the way nation A believes it is being perceived by nation B;

"4" is the actual image or way that nation A is perceived by nation B;

"5" is the projected image, the way nation A is promoting itself to nation B;

and "6" is the desired future image, the way nation A wants to be perceived by nation B.

This representation relies on Anthony Smith's depiction of national identity as "a group identity based on key elements such as historic territory, common language, laws, myths and memory." (Smith, 1991 in Budnitskiy, 2012, p.14). In the context of this research, its purpose is to highlight the desired result of all promotional efforts which go into nation branding: the way nations WANT to be seen by the global arena. It can therefore be interpreted that branding campaigns have much to draw from the desired future image of the country they are representing, and its national identity.

III. Findings

This section will contain an empirical and historical study of the Romanian nation branding activities developed so far, in the context of transition from communism.

Nation branding is quickly becoming known as a miracle worker for the younger, smaller and poorer countries of the world, which have found themselves in need of a competitive advantage within the new global marketplace (Anholt, 2003, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Olins, 1999; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). Countries in Central and Eastern Europe fit right into this category, and have shown to have gained a suitable benefit from such a phenomenon (Anholt, 2003).

It has however become apparent that the nation branding research field has mostly stayed within the marketing domain and inside a functionalist, apolitical paradigm (Kenava and Popescu, 2011), with few studies actually studying the challenges of national redefinition through branding in the wake of communism (Aronczyk, 2007; Baker, 2008; Bolin, 2006; Dzenovska, 2005; Jansen, 2008). It is within this paradigm that this thesis seeks to fit in, by examining the way Romania has engaged with nation branding.

Transition

"Nation branding arrived to CEE in the thick of transition and is, therefore, inevitably intertwined with post-communist identity struggles. What kinds of identities were marked as 'shameful' or as 'desired' became a central area of contestation in nation branding initiatives" (Kaneva, 2012, p. 7).

For 50 to 70 years, the Socialist bloc exercised an enormous influence upon CEE countries, including Romania, by effectively isolating them from the rest of the developing world: "by stopping the export of their national products and preventing people from traveling abroad, the Soviet regime effectively deleted the old, distinctive European nation brands that had been created and enriched over centuries of more benign rule. Most of these states are now working hard to rebuild their images and their identities, and it is a slow and painful process" (Anholt, 2007, p.118).

During the authoritarian rule, other Soviet countries responded to communism with acts of popular resistance and even revolt (1966 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia). Romania's ruler, Nicolae Ceauşescu, however, was beloved for a long time and retained his rule unto the abrupt bloody end. Still in shock and awe at the happenings, Romania breathed a collective exhale in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution, as round-the-clock coverage forgot to mention the US's and Western Europe's previous temporary support for Ceauşescu, in order to preserve the image of inhumanity and failure of communism (Bardan and Imre, 2012).

The 1989 revolutions in Europe where the background of a definitive moment in Romanian history: the country was faces with the necessity of effectively and efficiently re-inventing itself, in the context of long-standing European aspirations. Nation branding was a strategy that promised to deliver the desired results and more, through the active rejection of communist identity and the construction of renewed national appearances (Kaneva and Popescu, 2011, p. 196). Further, is proved to play an essential part in the context of the construction of identity narratives: "The conflicting discourses of national self-identification and of European integration coexist in the post-Soviet environment and are continually renegotiated in political, economic and cultural terms. In this context, nation branding provided one opportune site for such negotiations, and a discourse of identity construction that could, at least superficially, accommodate the conflict pressures of differentiation and integration." (Kaneva, 2012, p.9) It can therefore be asserted that Romanian national identity and Romanian nation branding are essential parts of the same process of post-communist transition.

In the upheaval of transition, Nadkarni (2007) points out that Romania "dislocated the fixed symbolic system of the previous regime" (p. 612). Symbolically, this happened through the cutting of the communist coat of arms, leaving a gaping hole in the middle of the national flag. This renegation of the communist identity lay way for new symbols and emblems to figuratively "fill the gap" that 45 years of communism had left and to reclaim the national identity that the totalitarian regime had hijacked "by an intricate web of party propaganda" (Kenava and Popescu, 2011, p. 195). Therefore, it can be said that the issue of national identity had been present but hidden under the radar of different versions struggling to emerge, which "entered into battle with one another in the politicized world of Romanian culture and, in so doing, perpetuated a Romanian national ideology within an order claiming to be socialist" (Verdery, 1991, p. 3).

Within this context it can be argued that Romania stands to gain more than just touristic and investment relevance from its national branding, as "the commercial practice of nation branding is closely linked to the deployment of narratives of globalization at the end of the Cold War" (Jansen, 2008, p. 112).

Romania, as part of Eastern Europe "has been subject to largely pejorative constructions in the West" (Hall, 1999, p. 232), and is therefore being represented based on stereotypes, as Westerners choose. That is why, for such countries, a comprehensive and complete branding strategy serves a particular and important purpose: more than simply promoting the country as a destination, it serves to reinvent the country's image in an effort of distancing itself from the communist legacy and even takes part in the ideological formation of national identity (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011).

The main functions of nation branding in the context of transition have been detailed by Szondi: "to distance the countries form the old communist system; to change negative or false stereotypes; to redefine and reconstruct national identities by emphasizing the 'Europeanness' and recreating a new national image and dissociate from the communist past; to increase the incomes from tourism and generate customer loyalty" (Szondi, 2006 in Cretu, 2011, p. 22).

Unfortunately, so far, the way nation branding has been used in the Romanian region has been to counteract the negative rather than promote the positive (Hall, 1999). This is in addition to other challenges faced as part of the branding process, which include:

- EU accession requirements for a "modern image"
- Reversing the negative image, regarding infrastructure, conflict, instability
- Projecting a safe and friendly environment for foreign tourists
- Developing niche products as a result of changes in global demand
- Ensuring capital for long term brand promotion instead of opting for short term investment
- Gaining support and collaboration from stakeholders
- Balancing the needs of Western tourists (niche market tourism) with those of east-European tourists (mass market tourism)
- Politicization of the branding process (internal rivalry, lack of continuity)
- Excessive reliance on advertising and image
- Lack of correspondence of image to reality (Hall, 1999; Szondi, 2006; Cretu, 2011)

Ever since the collapse of the communist hegemony in 1989, Romania has been attempting to redefine its notion of national identity, mainly by rejecting the identities which had been created during the four decades of socialism. Given its decidedly harsh experience with totalitarianism, Romania has been trying to forget its communist experience and present a new and improved image to the world. However, as opposed to other Central and European countries, Romania has had a more difficult time in making a decisive break with the former regime, causing its transitional state. Many of the former nomenklatura were present in the 1990 to 1996 governments, there has been a slow pace in the reformation of the economic structures inherited from communist centralized economy, etc.

Nation Branding in Romania

Post-Communist Romanian Communication Campaigns

In the year 1996, the Romanian government under then-President Ion Iliescu granted ~$6m towards the publication of a premium photo album entitled "Eternal and Fascinating Romania", which should have arrived in 96 countries worldwide by the Romanian diplomatic missions, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, Greenland, China, Taiwan, etc. (Surcel, 2006 in Popescu and Corboş, 2010). This version of "Romania's business card" also included maps and lyrical descriptions of the countryside and aimed to impose a positive image of the unique, but still undiscovered country. However, by March 1998, only 10 000 albums ended up seeing the light of day and only 4,200 reached Romanians, at an exorbitant price of 600 euros per copy. It can be argued that, due to the nature of the transition from its communist past, the album itself became the victim of domestic politics, trapped between the views of different political parties of how and by whom the country's reputation abroad should be managed. "Eternal and Fascinating Romania" was to be an important step towards the improvement of Romania's nation brand image, by promoting the true values of the country over its unfortunate dark past. However, it proved to be an opportunity for negative publicity, having been associated with an embezzlement scandal between the Romanian Presidency, and Romanian-French business man Adrian Costea accused and convicted of money laundering (Sepi, 2013). All in all, it had far-reaching implication for Romania and its image abroad, in the very worst of senses.

A second campaign was launched soon after, in 1998-1999, under the "Come as a tourist, leave as a friend" slogan, with the aim of marketing the country as a valid touristic destination for North Americans. It was short-lived, as a combination of Greece having previously used the same slogan in 1994 and lack of sufficient funds led to the abandonment of the campaign.

The solar eclipse from August 11th, 1999 proved to be an opportunity for the development of yet another promotional campaign that year. Titled "The 1999 eclipse", it promoted Romania as having the "best vantage points for the last eclipse of the millennium" (p. 895), and consisted of commercial spots broadcast on the Discovery Channel, Eurosport and Euronews. Other funds were invested in fair and exhibit participation, including prints. Unfortunately, results were disappointing, due to slow privatization and an almost complete lack of entrepreneurialism. Of a predicted 500 000 participants, only 3000 attended (5) and left completely disappointed by the lack of souvenirs available (t-shirts, posters) and the unavailability of the commemorative 2,000 Lei bill (~ 12 cents U.S.) which had been issued for the occasion (Sepi, 2013).

In the year 2000, a public-private initiative meant to halt the "decline in domestic production and loss of important milestones of the national economy" (www.fir.ro in Popescu and Corboș, 2010, p. 883) of the Romanian manufacturing industry was launched, under the name "Made in Romania", by the Association for Promoting Products and Services – Romania (APPSR). "Fabricat in Romania", as it was known to locals, was to act as a quality seal, in order to showcase Romanian products and increase trust in them. The developed logo and slogan were meant to be inextricably linked to the image of Romania in the minds of the consumers. Timing couldn't be worse: the internal market was dominated by imports and there was a general negative perception regarding domestic products. This aspect can also be related to transition, in the sense that the deprivation of the people of foreign goods, which was a major problem in the Ceaușescu era, led to distaste for domestic products (which were scarce) and the apparition of black markets. In the end, Romanians ended up putting their trust in foreign-based certification systems, which still carry more weight nowadays, leading this particular campaign to go bankrupt in 2005.

Perhaps one of the most famous campaigns was "Dracula Park", an idea which debuted in 2001 and was meant to finally have Romania capitalize on Bram Stoker's story which is loosely based on Vlad the Impaler. Its location was moved several times, people

argued that it would diminish the historical value of the area (Sighisoara, an inhabited medieval citadel) and the project ended up once again, in prosecution, due to 13,000 investors which had been let down (Sepi, 2013).

It was about the year 2001 that the Romanian Government truly began realizing the depth of the Romanian "image problems." The country therefore embarked on its first real international campaign "meant to improve the country's image abroad and encourage tourism" (Pavel, 2012, p.896).

The General Directorate for the Promotion of Tourism commissioned the campaign under the name of "Romania – always surprising", following a tender from which the Ogilvy&Mather Advertising company emerged as the winner. This campaign had its share of scandal, as the winning company was accused of having offered too low of a price.

Numerous other smaller programs were proposed and developed during 2000-2003: "Super ski in the Carpathian Mountains", "Salvamont", "Romania – Country of Wines", "Cruises on the Danube", "Blue Flag", "Q Mark (Seal) Program", "Romanian Casino", "Infoturism", "Mamaia – Riviera of the East", "Europa Resort", "National tourist parks", "The rehabilitation of burnt lodges", "Old trains", "Cultural and religious tourism" (Pavel, 2012).

The sheer diversity and number of these programs was too much to handle for the country. With the country's tourism framework still in need of development, and due to lack of communication between central, local authorities and local business communities, the main actors in the implementation of the campaigns, most of the programs were not put into practice. Unrealistic deadlines, absence of strategy, false hopes and expectations and lack of sufficient sources of funding and allocation of budgets were also to blame.

2004 saw phase two of "Romania – always surprising" being initiated, with the same agency obtaining the contract, unopposed (Obae and Barbu, 2004). This lack of competition triggered a chain of compromises and shortcuts that eventually led to a flood of criticism. There was a slight change to the slogan (Romania – simply surprising), the campaign included the Danube Delta, it primarily aimed to improve Romania's image abroad and attract foreign tourists (20-55 year-olds, average income, interested in new experiences, culture and history). However, the campaign's lack of originality was relevant, in the overused adjective "surprising": Singapore (1980's), Rwanda (1991), Bosnia (1995) and Chile (2005) were all surprising at one point and "being surprising per se is not potentially

enticing" (Bird and Smadeanu, 2006 in Pavel, 2012). Had Romania invested more time, funding and especially qualified personnel in the campaign, it might have lasted past 2007, when it was cancelled. It was the result of severe criticism on part of the World Tourism Organization, in particular Richard Batchelor, chief of the international consultants team from the World Tourism Organization who said that "the slogan 'simply surprising' didn't communicate the essence of Romania for any potential visitor" (Pavel, 2012, p. 897).

Another year called for another attempt at improving Romania's image abroad. $8m US dollars were invested by the Ministry of Tourism, along with numerous research studies being commissioned by the Agency for Governmental Strategies and the National Authority for Tourism, in order to draw a comprehensive image of the country's branding abroad. Countries with high relevance for Romania were chosen to conduct the in-depth perception studies in: Finland, Sweden, Germany (2006), Italy (2008) and Spain (2008). Romania's transitional circumstances were tightly related to the reasoning behind choosing these particular countries: during the communist period Romania had received numerous tourists from Germany and the Nordic countries, as well as having a solid minority of immigrants in Spain and Italy. These immigrants left searching for a better life, in the wake of the difficult post-communist transition, and consequently generated a generally negative reflection of Romania in the specific countries' mass media.

One of the attempts at promoting the country on the accession to the EU was the "Romania – Fabulospirit" campaign. Initiated in 2006, it aimed to highlight the spirituality of the Romanian people and was an attempt to differentiate the country from others. Various criticism led to its cancellation the very same year, following the resignation and replacement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The new Minister "decreed its inapplicability and the importance of a sound project that would not hurt Romania's quasi-inexistent image abroad."(*idem*). The agenda of the campaign focused on marking the country's accession to the EU and to associate the Romanian people with "a spiritual people with a rich inner life". In the end, even its authors decreed that they "did not try to create a country brand, but only a tool for changing the image of Romania in the world" (Popescu and Corbuş 2010, p. 886).

2007 marked the year when one of the very few campaigns aimed at another aspect of nation branding except tourism was launched: "A fresh look at Romania". Started by the Ministry of European Integration (MEI) it was for the very first time aimed at the international business environment. It was developed in "The Economist" and "Financial

Times" between March and April 2007 and portrayed opportunities offered by the country's economic development. The articles however, lacked in many areas: the "prints looked bad: had too much text, were hard to read, did not have any photos, for more authenticity they wanted to imitate magazine pages, but they were not even close to their style and did not attract anyone's attention" (Brand Identity, 2007 in Popescu and Corbuş, 2010, p. 887).

In 2008 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs embarked on a public diplomacy campaign aimed at Italy and Spain, entitled "The Romanians in Europe". The purpose was to highlight the Latin roots shared by the three nations, which should surpass the social and economic differences separating them. To be more specific and relatable the campaign took several forms: in Italy, the campaign "Romania: piacere di conoscerti", took the slogan "Romania: un mondo da scoprire" and in Spain the name of campaign was „Hola, soy rumano". A total of 7.9 mil euro were spent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to carry out the diplomatic campaigns. Studies had shown that foreigners were experiencing a reluctance towards Romanian immigrants "as a result of perceived criminality and a biased media coverage" (Sepi, 2013, p.7). The campaign was handled by Saatchi&Saatchi Romania but experienced a sudden loss in credibility when it was discovered that they had used actors instead of real immigrants in the spots.

More interest into Romania's nation brand was generated in 2008 by the Ministry of Tourism, when they commissioned several Romanian advertising agencies to create a brief for what would eventually be called "Romania's tourism brand." Taylor Nelson Sofres (THR) ended up winning the pitch in 2009 and a new campaign was launched, "Romania - Land of Choice". Ads were broadcast by Eurosport and CNN, using a common logo that represented the country's varied landscape, but did nothing to differentiate Romania from most Central and Eastern European Countries. The tagline read "The land of choice", a concept of "one country, so many experiences", and it was involved in a scandal as it had been previously registered at the State Office or Inventions and Brands by a private individual (Popescu and Corbuş, 2010).

The official video promoting the campaign received harsh criticism, directed at the Ministry of Tourism at the time. Apparently, the unrealistic portrayal of the country generated video responses named "The Truth about Romania", "Come in the summertime, when we are abroad" and ""We are the End of Choice", sarcastically depicting the dire conditions that the ad concealed. Moreover, the "tourism anthem" featured in the ad was

described as "a very bad joke" (Antonesei, 2009), and as the newspaper quoted: "the real question is what sense such a song can make for a sector that really deserves a requiem or a funeral march?"

In the spirit of this criticism, Romania turned to three of its sport legends: Nadia Comăneci, Ilie Năstase and Gheorghe Hagi, to star in a campaign that, for once, was accurate: the idea that foreigners know nothing about Romania. It depicted the surreal projections often associated with Romania, by the tourists. However, the campaign focused too much on the audience and too little on the content of its own brand and ended up confusing tourists even more. Statistically speaking, these ads have been deemed ineffective. As one author states „the number of tourists in Romanian hotels decreased by 21.9 % in 2009. Newspaper articles with headlines such as "Romanian Tourism in Free Fall" and "Romania, the European Country with the Lowest Number of Foreign Tourists," reported a shrinking number of foreign visitors. Foreign marketing experts, and even some critical scholars, tend to blame the strategy itself" (Pavel, 2010, p.898).

Recently, the World Expo in Shanghai celebrated the „Day of Romania", in July 2010, during which Romania's current nation/tourism brand was launched. „Explore the Carpathian Garden" is a communication campaign encompassing a new slogan and logo. The launch of the event was shadowed by controversy stating that part of the logo is almost identical to one up for sale in an online database (www.shutterstock.com), and had therefore been used by several other campaigns.

Figure 3 - Romania's logo, Oltchim's imprint, the set sold on shutterstock.com and the logo of the transport company
Source: *Capital Magazine* no. 30 (884)/2 August 2010

„Business people in the travel sector and branding consultants say the slogan's message is hard to decode by foreign tourists and can generate confusion considering that the Carpathian mountain range crosses several countries" (Pavel, 2010, p. 899), therefore acting as free indirect advertising for other destinations. Research was again conducted for the purposes of this campaign in countries such as: Germany, UK, Italy, Russia, Austria, US, France and Hungary[3], as well as the launching of a trilogy of documentaries titled Wild Carpathia, which benefited from the support of the Prince of Wales (an activist for the protection of ecosystems and lifestyles in Transylvania). The campaign's agenda included enabling Romania to have a clear identity and location in foreign minds and to improve its image abroad. However, criticism was to be expected: "When you see the pyramids you think about Egypt. When you see an image of the Eiffel Tower you think about Paris. The Tower Bridge is a symbol of London, and the Statue of Liberty a symbol of New York" says Michael Brandtner.

Post-communist Romania was given a second chance at reinventing herself. Unfortunately, the country lacks the means, funds and opportunity to do so. Romania's image abroad has led to a multitude of missed opportunities, judgment and generally suspicious looks. Efforts have been discredited based on the country of origin, foreign investors have been hesitant and foreign policy has been less and less effective (Schengen) (Sepi, 2013).

The troubled and confused nation that emerged in the years following the Revolution went through a process of transitional democracy and transitional rebranding of the national image. When dealing with nation branding in his book Competitive Identity (2007), Simon Anholt explained that a country's image can change if "the country changes" or if "the country does something to its people". Despite the small window of sympathy from the West experienced shortly after the Revolution, June 1990's Mineriad, which is believed to have been purposefully by former communist leaders as a desperate attempt at maintaining power changed the slightly positive perspective the new regime had amassed so far. Romanian public diplomacy took a serious hit following this heavily mediatized, government-endorsed, civilian cruelty, leading to the first cracks in Romania's image abroad (Sepi, 2013).

The troubles of transition can be traced back to the extreme nationalism instilled by the communists during their reign, in order to consolidate their power. The idealized conception of Romania as the most beautiful country in existence, with kind people, a rich

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[3] Source: www.romania-insider.com, accessed on 19 March 2014.

language, outstanding culture and valiant forefathers that had protected the boundaries of Western Europe from the Turks (Sepi, 2013, p. 2) had become general knowledge in Romania. Following the fall, the people developed coping mechanisms: emigration, adoption of Western values, nostalgia and skepticism against capitalism and the West. Market liberalization, which had led to economic difficulties, was also a cause of national dissatisfaction which was initially directed at the political elites and led to a 1996 power change. The country experienced a decline in living standards as well as healthcare, a rise in corruption and a restrictive visa system. Several types of parties later, the lever of dissatisfaction has led to hopelessness, anger and disbelief in the Romanian identity, leading to the fall of citizen diplomacy.

Important cultural elements such as sports, sciences and arts were neglected and severely underfunded and began to falter in their role as effective ambassadors of Romania abroad. Cultural diplomacy, "the exchange of information, knowledge, ideas, values, arts and other aspects of culture with the goal of facilitating access and building dialogue, understanding and trust" (p. 3) crashed. With culture and identity being so closely related, the nation's image in the international circles was also negatively affected. This led to a brain drain and a worsening of the country's self-confidence and reputation. "The more the West was appalled by the people of the country and the way they behaved, the more Romania responded with pretty pictures of its landscape, failing to understand that, as a Romanian proverb says, "places are made holy by men"." (p.3)

Not including classical democracy and according to research, Romania's branding efforts have been centered around tourism and culture, with limited and sparse efforts in the realms of people, export brands, foreign investment and innovation. The idea of an encompassing nation brand seems all but abandoned, with the country's efforts concentrated on its touristic brand of a Romania which became highly funded from European funds.

In theory, there was a lot of planning and "saying" and not as much "doing" or putting into practice. There was a severe lack of necessary internal policy measures (examples include stable legislation, good governance and education system, transparent privatization, professionalization of tourism, a proactive approach in international and regional organization participation) and an obsession with only the "image" part of branding and a pattern of excuses, defensive communications which replaced a well-balanced and trusting dialogue (Sepi, 2013).

Romanian promotional campaigns are filled with mysticism, a flow between past and present, glowing, folk and legend. All symbols with which a Romanian citizen would relate to, having grown to be familiar with the symbolism of his culture, but which would most probably appear confusing to outsiders. An idyllic melting pot of folkloric symbolism, rather than an appropriate personification of the Romanian way of being, this aspect leads to concerns regarding the interpretation of national identity in Romania itself.

It currently focuses on its landscapes (mountains, seaside) and uses symbols from elements such as earth, water, forests, sun, etc. In order to develop a product that has a basis in reality and has real-life appeal, market research was conducted in 8 countries + Romania, and showed affinity for the following: rural tourism, health and wellness, adventure tourism, wild nature, cultural circuits and city breaks.

Although the leaf and its colour have numerous roots in Romanian culture, criticism was to be expected:

- "they are generic and not unique the colour green triggers strong associations with ecology and bio products, while Romania still has a lot of catching up to do in that department (even though the food may come directly from the peasant's garden, there is still a lot of litter everywhere)
- the font of the writing and the language used are neutral and remind us of a mass product rather than a niche discovery; they are rather bland
- the word "garden" brings to mind a man-made area, orderly and carefully trimmed, whereas Romania prides itself on being the last wilderness of Europe (again, perhaps one of the reasons why Romanians identify more with Wild Carpathia).
- the Carpathian mountains extend beyond Romania, to the Ukraine and Slovakia, so confusions are possible" (Sepi, 2013, p.10).

However, in the context of nation branding, this is not the most serious issue. Romania's lack of export, investment and policy aspects within its national brand, however, is severely affecting its effectiveness. Areas such as investment, exports and education show potential which has yet to be harnessed by nation branding strategies.

Further, long-standing narratives of the country being situated at the border of East and West can also be identified, the unknown and the modern, with the transgression symbolized by rushing arrows, opening doors, floating boats down a running river. This symbolic, which

has been previously identified in research (Bjelic and Savic, 2002; Todorova, 1997), has gradually developed into what authors call a "Balkan globalization critique" (Baker, 2008, p. 177). Baker's criticism stands against presenting "something exotic and distinctive in an attractively modernized package" (2008, p. 177), a common national representation method in post-communist countries. In short, it accuses Eastern European cultural workers of being "complicit in the continued reproduction of stereotypical and exoticized national representations for the purpose of selling them back to Western audiences who find them familiar and comfortable" (Ditchev, 2002; Volcic, 2005 in Kaneva and Popescu, 2011, p. 202).

Studies and real-life examples such as the Greek and Turkish experience have shown that it is not the proximity to Western Europe that has been a problem in post-communist Romania, but rather the country's image among the potential tourists stemming from these countries.

Aside from widely reported incidents such as civil unrest, widespread violence, conflict between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania, its mixed track record in human rights and rise of extremist nationalism, attacks on Western tourists were also reported, as well as organized street crime, all of which further contributed to the negative image of Romania. This aspect can also be cumulated with the fact that former communists still dominated within the newly created government, creating suspicion, especially since this was not the case in other former communist countries (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland).

Following the 1996 elections things seemed to be taking a turn for the good, but frequent disputes since members of government coalitions from then on have shown that Romania is still characterized by uncertainty, when it comes to politics and economy (Gallagher, 1998).

Nation Brands Index

The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index is one of the most comprehensive mechanisms, measuring the power and quality of brand images, by analysing six dimensions: exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, tourism and investment, and immigration. (www.gfkamerica.com)

So far, Romania has not scored high enough to be included in the top 50 most powerful branded nations, despite being the 7th largest European country by population and 9th by

surface. The 50-year communist experience has taken a toll on Romania's transition to democracy and market economy, with nation branding not being made a priority.

This has led to expert voices stating a not so favourable set of opinions: "one of the most negative, dull and unfair image of all civilised present countries" (Anholt, 2006[4]), "Romania is changing but the general perception of it remains", "more things have been done for the country than the country has done for itself" (Olins, 2007[5]).

Romania nation branding efforts according to Anholt's (2007) Nation Brand Hexagon can therefore be summarized such as:

Exports:

According to Romania's endeavours in exports so far have only focused on the quality of and loyalty to locally made products, in some way connected to the country-of-origin effect. Aspects such as durability, reliability, workmanship, international position, uniqueness, technological advancement have been little taken into account or largely ignored by the government, with the responsibility falling into the hands of the private entrepreneurs, which have had to work in harsh economic conditions.

Governance:

Regarding governance, this paper has already discussed the hardships of the electoral system in the country, as well as preconceived ideas to issues such as human rights, corruption, transparency and stability. However, it can be seen that there is still much work to be done in these areas, as well as other such as foreign/domestic policies, observance of the law, respect for minorities, and the judicial system. While work has been done for the purposes of NATO and EU accession, the country lacks the civil society and political determination to be able to effectively implement changes in all required areas.

Culture and Heritage:

The Romanian heritage has been so far connected with issues regarding the relationship between tourism and the politics of identity in the region. The country's construction of a new post-communist identity has so far been the main point of its

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[4] Source - http://www.money.ro/simon-anholt-romania-are-imaginea-unui-cadavru_5097.html, accessed on 19 May 2014.
[5] Source - http://www.9am.ro/stiri-revista-presei/Business/55107/Interviu-Wally-Olins-Romania-devine-brand-fara-stirea-ei.html, accessed on 19 May 2014.

promotional campaigns, with attempts being made to preserve the authenticity of the country's traditional, pre-communist past. However, trying to isolate its transitional state from its direct cause, decades of communism, has proved to be a gigantic obstacle in its way. The quality of its music, movies, literature and art in general has been generally forgotten within the development of its promotional campaign, which have focused largely on landscape attractiveness and sport performance.

People:

There is no aspect that has had to suffer more from Romania's negative reputation than its people. Their friendliness and hospitality are frequently overshadowed by issues such as corruption, poverty, the unending debate about the origin of the Roma and other detrimental features. Aspects such as inventiveness, industriousness, quality and the ability to adapt to any cultural environment are largely unknown in the international domain, and are not present within the country's promotional campaigns. There have, however, been a few recent attempts at promoting sport stars as ambassadors, but even they have been deemed as Ambassadors of Romanian Tourism, rather than of the country itself.

Tourism:

This is an aspect where the government does not lack involvement. Practically all of its campaigns have focused on this domain, with nation branding practically becoming synonymous with tourism. This dimension has already been discussed, but there have been certain aspects which the government has omitted both to promote and act upon: the people's attitudes to visitors, the country's climate, customer service and hospitality, international airport image, safety, etc. While not all of these aspects are at the level that they should be in a European country, it is this writer's opinion that they should be included and promoted accordingly, in order to offer a full, holistic image of the country and dismiss presuppositions.

Investment and Immigration:

In recent times, the country has been trying to promote its business opportunities as a separate to its touristic value. Consequently, its telecommunications and transportation system have been promoted as developing, though much work still needs to be done, its availability of raw material and skilled labour have been expressed and its educational system has gained recognition. Romanian investment opportunities have been on the rise since the

country's EU accession in 2007. In fact, Central and Eastern Europe in general has seen a substantial amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) since its shift to a free market economy, especially after 1994 when the European Union (EU) committed itself to enlarging (Fahy et al., 1998; Bandeji, 2000; Bevan et al., 2001).

According to the Ernst & Young Attractiveness Survey 2006 (which ranks European countries based on investors' perception and their relevance to branding), "Romania, along with the Czech Republic and Poland, have a better image than reality and is facing the challenge to put its image into reality. This survey is basically outlining the major findings and compares image (perception) with reality. Out of 15 countries Romania scores 10 in the section of ranking image compared to 12 in the section of reality (ranking of Foreign Direct Investment). In conclusion, Romania is relying on a better image than reality" (Dumbrăveanu, p. 42).

Currently, Romania is the 6th most appealing European country for foreign investments for the next 3 years, according to the Ernst & Young study "2012 European Attractiveness Survey". According to Bogdan Ion, Country Managing Partner, Ernst & Young Romania, summarised Romania's good points: "Romania has the advantage of a promising GDP growth rate compared to the European average as well as of a valuable human capital. We see more and more investors attracted by the renewable energy sector. More privatisations are scheduled for the next period, encouraging investors from all over the world to look towards Romania. It is essential to stimulate this positive evolution by effective economic strategies".[6]

One problem might be the implication of too many bodies and institutions in the process of attempting to develop a nation brand: "the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Board for Strategic Development, Ministry of Regional Development and Housing, Ministry of Communication and Information Society, Ministry for SMEs, Trade and Business Environment, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Ministry of Tourism, followed by the National Chamber of Commerce and Investment Promotion Agencies" (Dumbrăveanu, p. 42).

Romania took a strong hit from almost 50 years of communism, which have left marks in the collective mentality of its people. A struggling economy, 50% rural and antic

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[6] Source - http://www.thebrc.co.uk/romania-is-the-6th-most-appealing-european-country-for-foreign-investments-for-the-next-3-years/, accessed on 19 May 2014 .

infrastructure are signs of a country that is still in a process of transition from its dark past. In this context and through the perspective of intercultural communication, "cultural values that are essential in the reconstruction of national identities" (Dolea, 2013) should be placed at the basis of the promotion process. Opposed to this perspective, the Romanian government has been using modern instruments for the promotion of the country, without taking account that these images of Romania are built for foreigners and not supported by existent reality.

IV. Analysis and Discussion

This section contains a discussion on the theories presented, applied to the research conducted in the previous chapter. The upcoming chapter also provides answers to the thesis' problem formulation, questions and conclusions.

This paper's research has shown that, in the case of transitional Romania, reality is better than perception, with most foreigners improving their view post-visit, and that the country's biggest image problem is the fact that the international arena lacks enough information, due to Romania's lack of communication skills.

Following the presentation of the various branding activities Romania has been involved in for the past 25 years and in the context of the chronological analysis of the campaigns conducted so far, one can draw the following conclusions:

Following the discussion on the nation branding situation of transitional Romania, there are several conclusions which can be drawn with respect to answering the research questions posed in the beginning.

Q1: *In what ways has Romania faired with nation branding in the context of its transition from its communist past?*

Romania has so far dealt with isolated actions, at a governmental level, promoting a complex picture of the country and supported by albums, TV spots, labels, etc. Every attempt was however surrounded by speculation, corruption, doubt and most ended up being cancelled. Two distinct time period can be identified, regarding the development of the post-communist image campaigns (Dolea and Țăruş, 2009, pp. 85-86):

• 1996-2006 – a period of time when Romania actively attempted to distance itself from the negative background of communism and lack of democracy. Despite frequent attempts, the period passes without improving the country's mark on the world.

• 2007-2014 – following its accession to NATO (2004) and the EU (2007) the issue of nation branding is brought more often into discussion.

Simon Anholt has stated that a nation brand primarily depends on the will of its governors, and how much of a priority they make out of building the brand itself. Therefore, this thesis has analysed the Romanian government-supported nation branding campaigns and

their outcomes, through an interpretative perspective, in order to inspect their effort of branding the nation in its transitional context.

Sub question: *What issues arise as a result of transition involvement in this process?*

The perpetual transition Romania has been trying to find herself through the past 25 years has led to a country with a greatly confused identity. Combined with the inherently unstable political institutions, which have been struggling ever since the regime change of 1989, Romania seems to have lost track of its purpose. Many frequent changes of brand, logo, slogan, content have not given a national brand the chance, time or opportunity to form and spread, as a "stable, clear, visionary, sharp, well-managed and consistent" (Sepi, 2013, p. 14) one should. Besides its lack of vision, the country has also been hindered by the absence of qualified personnel "with the right values for the tactical implementation of the nation branding program" (*idem*). Whether this is to blame on the brain drain or on Romania's inability to provide sufficient funding to hire such people, or even both, the aspect of nation branding has not been acknowledged as a priority, rather as a side-project with on-again-off-again advertising.

Q2: *How has national identity been involved within Romania's nation branding strategies?*

The promises of nation branding are being halted by the country's lack of internal consensus regarding who or what the nation is in the first place. Therefore, Romanian advertisers and the government have settled for presenting what the West wants to see, confirming Urry's (2001) proposal that "consumption-oriented representations satisfy a 'tourist gaze' at the cost of aesthetic uniformity" (Kaneva and Popescu, 2011, p. 202).

Widely publicized state-sponsored campaigns end up hijacking broader internal debates about national identity and efface the political nature of identity construction.

As Iordanova (2007) argues, commercial attempts to draw in visitors force a choice of 'attractions' that are 'often staged as representing the country' but ultimately: "enhance the sense of split identity, the consciousness of a perpetual differentiation between an image of oneself one projects outwards and presents as 'object of the tourist gaze' and another 'true' self, mostly characterized by being different, not identical with what is being projected" (p.47).

The volatility of tourism in Eastern Europe has not yet been overcome, but steps are being taken in the right direction. We can identify positive prospects, which result from overall progress of political and economic transition. Several elections have marked a decisive break with the country's communist past, gained the support of Western governments, and allowed for a significant change "in the nature and pace of reform in Romania" (Gallagher, 1998).

The country is continuously attracting foreign investors, both in hotel and transport infrastructure (IMF loans). Such developments can be only beneficial for its national image abroad, with the country emerging as more attractive, more stable and eager to meet expectations. The phrase "untapped potential" is frequently used in discussions (EIU 1993).

The development of rural tourism has been a relatively unproblematic, inexpensive way of presenting Romania in a different light, after the excesses of the Ceausescu era. It can therefore be concluded that, while Romania retains a considerable tourism potential, its values are not put into a good enough light.

Tourists can build expectations from holiday memories, which are associated with a unique set of values, eventually and voluntarily creating positive associations with the destination, and therefore with the country itself. By consolidating and strengthening the emotional connections between visitor and place, these elements help "reduce searching costs of the consumers and perceived risk. Together, these activities serve to creating a unique distinct image of a destination in the minds of the consumer" (Pavel, 2012, p. 895) and, along with the visitors themselves, can therefore be considered essential in building a nation brand.

A country such as Romania should theoretically attempt building a positive image through the selection and strategic combination of a mix of brand elements, which include terms, signs, names, logos, designs, symbols, slogans, colour, packages, architecture, typography, photographic styles, etc. as well as heritage, language, myths and legends (Blain et al, 2005 in Pavel 2012).

For too long, Romania has settled for building a destination brand instead of a solid nation brand, although it has been clear that the two cannot be used interchangeably. There is a need to eliminate erratic and weak advertising campaigns, to gain the support of the public, private sectors and of civil society, and to build a true-to-life nation brand, based on more than tourism and culture. In addition, the definition of local brands, identities and loyalties could also be beneficial for the development of cultural diplomacy.

Many negative perceptions have a basis in the truth, which is why Romania's branding strategy should "address the problems and communicate that they are being addressed as soon as progress can be demonstrated" (Anholt, 2007, p. 68). What is worse, however, is when the country is unknown and its reputation suffers indirectly, such as in regions of the Americas and other parts of the world.

As we have shown, Romania has already been associated with landscapes and rural scenery, but the real damage comes from its association with the negative image of the inhabitants. A popular saying reads "Romania is a great country. Too bad it's inhabited", a problem which should be addressed before any change of branding success.

Opening the dialogue of cultural diplomacy would really help in identifying where Romania's lackluster image comes from and act upon them with foresight. While it is easier to presume that all foreigners are either prejudiced or misinformed, many negative aspects have a grain of truth behind them.

What the people and its leaders should understand is that image is not valid without credibility and viceversa. The two are dependent on one another and should be addressed as a whole, beginning with the latter (Sepi, 2013).

Trust or credibility would allow Romania's national brand to pass through the collective subconscious of hurried critics and to build a sustainable, lasting image. This aspect can be constructed through citizen diplomacy (at an individual level) and cultural diplomacy (at the government, private sector, NGO's level).

To conclude this thesis, this researcher considers it appropriate to provide a few suggestions towards the development of an encompassing, positive and competitive nation brand for Romania. These recommendations have been developed in light of the results following the conducting of this research and will be structured on a framework of Szondi's (2006) functions of branding nations in transition, as are those which have emerged from the Soviet bloc.

Distancing the country from the old economic and political system, which existed before transition is a critical step which, as we have shown, Romania has already attempted to take a few steps in. However, difficulties in ridding itself of the nomenklatura from the government, as well as a severe economic crisis have hindered these efforts. What Szondi meant by this aspect was distancing the country from an ideological point of view, from

connotations of "backwardness, despair, something poor or inferior". In this researcher's opinion, the political and economic system can only benefit from the establishment of a system of credible and competent institutions, which are based on modern governmental principles and function on stable and recognized laws.

A second step in the framework would be t*o change negative or false stereotypes or reinforce some positive stereotypes associated with the country and its people.* In order to further delve into this subject, we must first understand the function of an archetype. Carl Jung is behind the development of a modern understanding of the archetype as a term of psychology referring to symbols of mythology, literature and art streaming from a collective consciousness and affecting the life experience.

The Romanian archetype, a summation of the experiences of its people, can be associated with aspects of national identity, drawing from history, culture and society. Its political, cultural and economic status can identify with themes such as: hero, revolution, sainthood, transition, resurrection, sacrifice, tradition, folklore, lore. At times inconsistent and even contradictory, the Romanian archetype is a depiction of its struggle to keep its tradition alive through numerous foreign occupations and the spread of capitalism over regionalism.

As this thesis has shown, there is a negative stereotype claiming the foreign thoughts about Romania, which can be improved upon by protecting the people, the values and working on disadvantages, while externally communicating the progress made in the area, through the diplomatic corps or other entities which relate to the international.

Another step would be t*o position the country as the reliable and eligible member of the new system, the transition is aiming for, or that of an international community.* In the case of CEE countries, the most important foreign policy goals following the fall of communism was to take part in international communities such as 'superbrands' NATO and the European Union. Integration within these communities would promulgate the adoption of Western values, liberal markets and democracy, to haste the transition and effectively promote the region. The international cooperation of would allow for the development of better relations with other countries on various issues (corruption, trafficking, Roma issues, etc.), improving the country's reputation and image in the global arena.

To support and justify this 'move' and demonstrate that these countries are worthy of the centre nations' support. The support of 'centre nations', or Western European countries is an essential component of Romania's nation branding, and the reason why these countries are

usually the primary targets of promotional campaigns. The promotion of Romania's efforts in the field of international cooperation is therefore essential, in an effort of *positioning the country as the centre of the region and the leader of transition*. Steps towards this can be taken by developing a more investor-friendly business environment, which supports both the private sector as well as the efforts of international investors, by connecting them to a global economy, rather than an isolated one. The diplomatic corps has the opportunity to shine by investing in cultural diplomacy, presenting the nation's values and culture, which should be preserved in the spirit of a hard-working, civilized country.

According to Szondi, b*randing can also facilitate (re-)defining and (re-)constructing national identities as identity is also changing during transition*. This is a statement that we can surely agree with, as we have reiterated several times the importance of national identity in the context of transition and branding of a nation. Transitional countries have a reputation of viewing themselves in a pessimistic way. Regarding this aspect, I consider it relevant to inflict radical changes on the way the people talk about the country amongst themselves, at home and in the international environment. As previously mentioned, Romanians have a detrimental opinion of the Romanian people, even going as far as hiding where they are from, implicitly causing a negative labelling. The promotion of the country first needs to start among its people, with positive aspects, held up obligations and promises. Only then can the people begin to be proud of themselves as a people, aside from the premises of patriotism and instilled nationalism from communist times.

Country branding can boost self-confidence (Anholt, 2003, p. 108) *and can be an expression of being proud of the achievements of transition*. Romania's state-sponsored marketing initiatives have failed to mobilize national pride amongst its nationals. This aspect has to do with the human factor of the nation that is being branded. Once again, I reiterate that Romanians should be more supportive to themselves, to endeavours, initiatives, inventiveness and development of values through a competitive education system, which can lead to gaining support for Romanian brands and innovations in the foreign environment.

Conclusion

One of the most important issues addressed in this paper is that, similarly to other countries of the former communist bloc of CEE, Romania's nation brand seems to emerge, rather than be constructed in an organized manner. The uncontrollable aspect of this phenomenon has led to the fact that Romania has undertaken a valiant series of efforts over the past 25 years, mostly to no avail (Sepi, 2013).

Clearly Romania's continuous presentation of post-communist imagery has posed a significant obstacle in the way of the country's nation branding endeavors over the years. The transition that followed the socialist regime was characterized by unfulfilled promises, the "exploitation of the periphery in merciless neoliberal competition among states", as well as disappointment in the cultural effects of consumerism, political corruption (Bardan and Imre, 2012, p. 3). Coupled with the population's own skepticism, all these have led to a post-communist government crisis of legitimacy, in all aspects, including that of nation branding, widening the gap between the attractive image they are trying to engineer and the national identities of the people that the brand is supposed to reflect.

To conclude, this research has formed an overall picture of the main steps in the attempted construction of the nation brand in Romania over a 25 year timeframe, acknowledging the key role of the state institutions, which have interacted with one another, the specialized communication structures involved in the promotion of the nation, a chronology of the promotion initiatives of Romania. Moreover, the constructivist approach has allowed for the highlighting of various aspects of history, transition and interaction between actors in this process of brand construction. This in turn has allowed for the development of not only an institutional conception regarding what is relevant about and for Romania and of what techniques and instruments should be used to promote it, but also of an understanding of the social realities, regarding transition and national identity. It has been shown how the initiatives themselves are generally considered failures as the instrumentalization of the modern communication practices within the Romanian Government was not enough for the promotion actions to be successful in a transitional environment. They must be accompanied by consistent public policies and to become intransient to the governing. At the same time, they must reflect the national identity of the promoted country. Towards this end, suggestions towards the development of a positive and

competitive nation brand for Romania have been given.These are some of the reasons why Romania's public agenda for building a nation brand did not benefit from the support of the public, having been dominated by expert discourse, assumed by the media and by the government, with the identity discourse marginalized in the context of transition.

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