

# THE PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT BRANDING. CASE STUDIES ON CITY BRANDING IN TRANSYLVANIA

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## **Abstract**

The study presents the project cycle management and the known branding processes in order to create a feasible and detailed plan for settlement branding aiming to create a guideline for brand makers. The second part of the study focuses on the critical parts of settlement branding in Transylvania, the evaluation of competition, targeting, definition of brand values as perceived by the internal and external target groups by schema-based authentication and stereotypes. The presented cases of municipalities in Transylvania have a practical approach and provide a guideline for brand builders by defining local values, making the community aware of them and promoting them in order to reach the targeted unique advertising position.

**Keywords:** city branding, regional branding, settlement branding, geographical location branding, communication, branding process, positioning, target groups, auto-stereotypes, hetero-stereotypes.

## 1. Introduction

Settlement or city branding means to find an unparalleled position for the city in question which arises from its endowments that make it unique, recognizable and distinguishable compared to other municipalities. To accomplish this we need to identify certain specific values, brand pillars which characterize the settlement, and the community embraces them and identifies with them. Quite often these are identity elements through which people consciously distinguish themselves from the inhabitants of other cities, regions and countries. Sometimes, these elements, although not consciously, become characteristic to the community in question. Thus, city branding becomes self-expression, promoting a community through its own values. The local community is always the primary target group while external target groups towards which these community values are presented become of secondary importance.

Taking into account the general arguments and the specific situation of Transylvania, we can highlight the following aspects related to city-branding:

1. Regional positioning: ensures a unique position among the towns of a given region.
2. It highlights the city in comparison with other cities: visitors may recognize the city due to this, and these factors of attraction are quite visible for investors.
3. The home-feeling: the inhabitants feel the difference; they are able to formulate why they are proud of their unique city; their well-being is enhanced; it promotes indirectly the returning of those who had left the city and improves the entrepreneurship.
4. Booking the value: it formulates and embraces values, sometimes considering them exclusive; it can identify and rationalize them (it becomes a factor in the creation of an identity).

In order to achieve all the above we first need to formulate the branding values and position them. By positioning, the city acquires a special place in the eyes of the target group and will stand out from the rest of the cities. There may be a competitive situation when compared to other similar cities, but it also may be the very first position in an entirely new category, allocating a value to the detriment of other cities. In an evolving area the branding of the settlements happens in a similar way. Right at the beginning we have to state that city branding is more than creating a visual presence or visual identity. It is a process of strategic planning, taking into consideration many social, cultural and economic elements in order to reduce the existing situation to a logical brand essence. The essence is represented by a few easily understood, remembered and recallable topics, symbols, slogans and even feelings.

Even if the settlement or place branding is a relatively new research field it has been adapted and used to promote image development for places, cities or even nations (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). The cornerstone was in the 1980s when the collapse of the industry forced new development fields to be exploited or brought to life. The changed possibilities and reset opportunities of settlement branding and the development aptitude of cities become the traction engine of their development. Ac-

According to this, the settlement branding and promotion got a highlighted importance and became a core part of settlement development plans and strategies.

In the following sections, we would like to provide a quick overview of the process of value establishment, branding, positioning, as well as of the possible directions for further improvement of the branding of regions and settlements in Transylvania.

## **2. The process of settlement branding**

Positioning and association of values go beyond the possibilities of marketing, thus in the scholarly literature there is a slow shift from marketing – both product and settlement marketing – to branding. This shift is mainly justified by the need for more complex and more organized processes which cannot be covered by extending the traditional '4P' classification to '7P'. The branding process, regardless of whether it refers to a certain product, organization, person, trademark, event or even settlement or region branding, features the same set of stages in creating and consolidating the brand. As Local Public Administration (LPA) decides that there is a need for a brand and a branding process, a complex planning and execution set of phases will be carried out. There are a number of approaches which will be presented in the following, and then our own set of phases created based on our personal settlement branding experience will be presented.

The Project Cycle Management (PCM), a cycle of operations for managing the European Commission's external assistance, features five phases (European Commission, 2004). In practice, the duration and importance of each phase of the cycle vary from project to project, depending on their scale and scope, and on the specific operating modalities under which they are set up.

1. Programming: focuses on identifying development priorities and the integration in higher level strategies; decides upon priorities, sector focus, type of assistance and financing modalities.
2. Identification: focuses on having a concept project relevant to main local needs and being consistent with higher level policies; decides upon acceptance, modification or rejection of the project idea(s).
3. Formulation: focuses on the sustainability of the project and its ability to deliver sustainable benefits; decides upon accepting, modifying or rejecting the project proposal.
4. Implementation: focuses on achieving the results by using resources efficiently and effectively; decides upon continuing to finance, on the modification of the scope or the termination of the support.
5. Evaluation: focuses on the results, the achievement of planned benefits, sustainability, and the lessons learned. Decides upon the change of the policies, on the scope of the future program or operating modalities.
6. Audit: focuses on compliance with applicable laws and rules, on meeting the efficiency, economic and effectiveness criteria; decides upon the continuation, modification or termination of the projects, the recovery of project funds, modification of the design of the future projects, and the change of policies.

The key element of PCM in local or regional branding is programming, forcing the LPA to develop projects integrated in higher national or international level strategies. As a public policy issue it gives the opportunity to redefine local public policies in order to have an integrated development. The experience of Romania shows that constant development of visions, objectives or long term aims barely exists, so it is common to have well-programmed regional development plans that meet the national standards and development priorities in the moment of design, and which become overrated during implementation since the national standards are modified.

The PCM indicates that a general 4-phase structure is suitable for most of the projects, events, development or branding processes. The planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation phases can be considered a complete cycle, the final evaluating phase repeating the primary evaluation in order to highlight the differences due to the project. The final phase can be considered the starting planning phase to a forthcoming repetitive project.

A specific branding process can also be built upon this four-stage structure in which outlining the future during planning has a particular importance as well as the presentation of the creative elements during the planning of the strategy (Healey, 2008).

1. Surveying the existing situation. Its role is to know the target group, the previous processes and their evaluation.
2. Outlining the view over the ideal future: harmonizing the results of the survey and the ideas, and creating the main concepts in developing the brand.
3. Combining strategy and creativity: creating a connection between the areas that have a specific role in creating and developing the brand, outlining a strategy, shaping and displaying a visual identity, and ensuring visibility.
4. Monitoring and then repeating the first stage: following-up the results, planning, testing, re-planning, and re-testing.

Creativity has an outstanding role in the patterns of city and regional planning; image and spirit have an even more powerful presence, and so do internal bonds and insights. Branding is considered to be a one-time, closed process, which is not cyclical by nature (Olins, 2008).

1. Research, analysis and strategic recommendations. Surveys regarding the target group, the market, communication and design, the results of which determine the particular action plan.
2. Creating identity and formulating the particular idea. The areas in which identity is visible are the behavior of the target group, the brand-building process as well as its designation and the visual representation.
3. Presentation and display. Presentation to the internal target group is in fact a pre-test before the entry on the market. It takes shape of a PR or image campaign; it is visible, perceptible, while the reactions help in re-planning.
4. Implementation. The final branding plan for the promotion of the determined visual identity is followed by the application of tools which make the brand public.

The models presented in the Anglo-Saxon scholarly literature approximate the models applicable in the Eastern European city and region branding (McEachern, 2006). The creative process and the insight emerge, and so does the project cycle approach.

1. The first stage is called understanding, and it implies an extensive research effort in order to understand the city, its assets, culture, traditions, and the views held by diverse groups. At this stage it is important to distinguish between the internal and the external audience.
2. The second stage is called insight. In the first section of the paper most of the definitions of the city-branding concept highlighted the fact that a brand should incorporate an emotional dimension that triggers the formation of associations in people's minds. At this stage all the facts gathered during the research effort need to be transformed into 'emotional sparks'. This stage focuses on defining the uniqueness of the place and identifying what makes that place special and different on the competitive market.
3. The third stage is called imagination. This is perhaps the most critical stage since all the data gathered and the emotional sparks are transformed into tangible products such as symbols, logos, message texts, value statements, etc.
4. The last stage is evaluation. Because branding is a strategic effort there needs to be some indication of whether the branding campaign reached its objectives.

All in all, with regard to the context of Eastern European public institutions a model can be created which accomplishes the expectations of the branding process, which is cyclical, meaning that it builds upon the previous processes and mirrors the expectations of the LPA regarding the branding. It includes aspects of project planning, creative processes, and it follows the stages of the branding.

1. The stage of planning and preparation:
  - a. Planning the project: determining the workflow, fixing the tasks undertaken and the deadlines, coordinating with the institutions and the partners, allocating tasks, and determining the resources;
  - b. Branding plan: determining the data analysis methods, the priorities and the work methods, abstracting the scholarly literature, setting the model, creating a coherent system of contents and aspects regarding the contents of the plan;
  - c. Programming: collecting internal and external city branding programs and analyzing them, summarizing the rules regarding strategic and development planning, and the national regulations and directives; and
  - d. Analyzing the situation: market research, surveying the behavior of the target groups and the amount of information they possess (interviews, surveys, questionnaires, focus groups), analyzing previous branding processes, image elements, and the involvement of the media and of the local elite.
2. Elaboration, the phase of creative work:
  - a. Creative process: identifying the view on future and on the areas to develop; identifying the brand pillars, brand values, and brand essence; identifying the

- insight, the existent feelings and those that can be developed, attitudes and bonds (value statement); identifying the identity and the Unique Advertising Position;
- b. Branding plan: determining the branding directives and strategies; creation of the phases of the branding plan (working groups);
  - c. Campaign: determining the target groups; selecting the tools and channels;
  - d. Visual identity: creating the image handbook; drafting the names and slogans; adjustment to channels and carriers; and
  - e. Re-planning: narrowing the development pillars or directives; verifying the compliance with existing policies; verifying the fulfillment of programming.
3. The output phase:
- a. Pre-tests: public presentations, public debates, reconciliation with the customer and other key-actors, creating and testing the prototypes of the visual carriers, visualizations, slogans, testing visual carriers (focus group product trials, public presentations, debate forums), consultation with branding specialists;
  - b. Re-planning or finalizing: completion or modification based on the results of the pre-tests, creation of the final branding plan and image handbook, and its delivery to the client;
  - c. Campaigns: launching the communication process, acquisition of publicity, addressing and involvement of local and external target groups; and
  - d. Monitoring: continuous monitoring of the shifts in opinions (periodical flash questionnaire surveys), shifts in the media image (content and form media monitoring including external and online media), in feed-back and consumption indicators (e.g. the sale of carriers).
4. Closing and evaluation:
- a. Post-surveys: repeating the planning stage, identifying the relevant differences and correspondences;
  - b. Closing and documenting: assimilation and interpretation of the results; correction of the plans, planning sustainable communication; creating a crisis scenario to prevent crisis situation; publication of the conclusions and the results; publication of professional articles.
  - c. Re-planning: verification, correction or redefinition of the compliance of the strategy with the policies (this phase becomes the pre-test of future branding processes); and
  - d. Institutionalization: establishing communication and city image offices within the LPA that will launch the plans following the closing of the project as well as the further operation of the process (continuous communication, events, preservation of organizational connections, media communication).

Depending on the city or the region to be branded, the different phases of the branding process can be further detailed, while others can be eliminated or the whole structure can be completed. Nevertheless, it is advisable to perform a comprehensive

previous analysis of the situation in the settlements where no branding plans or strategic development plans have been carried out. Similarly, there is a need for a stronger implication of the LPA if the process is planned in more detail for a longer period of time (e.g. creation of the communication image or the establishment of city image offices). The whole city branding process must be carried out under the control of the LPA in close partnership with other public institutions, NGOs and organizations of the private sector, but the LPA has the leading role and, at the same time, has to ensure the continuation of the process. The city branding process and the image-building campaigns face numerous problems and stumbling blocks while put into practice (Kádár, 2010). Therefore, it is paramount to prepare planning and evaluation as professionally as possible.

In the following part, the stages of preparation and planning will be presented, as well as the phase of elaboration and creative work. A special focus will be placed on the critical issues that are almost impossible to handle by the specificity of the Transylvanian social and cultural context and by the public institutions. We will analyze the case of settlements where at least one branding cycle has been carried out by the author, and, based on this, further directions will be formulated regarding the branding of the settlements in question as well as the wider Transylvanian region branding.

### **3. Planning and preparation**

The first stage can be described as an extensive research effort in order to understand the city assets, culture, traditions, and the views held by diverse groups. The core definition of the target groups and target audiences includes in the first place the internal audience (citizens, agglomeration areas, frequent visitors) and the external target groups and audiences (tourists, investors, occasional visitors, etc.). A correspondence must exist between externally presented brand values and internally experienced values, i.e. the marketing should reflect both the citizens' conception of their city and what visitors experience. Missing the correspondence leads to an identity conflict stopping the city to develop its unitary image. A proper understanding and value projection require an exhaustive project planning, preliminary evaluations, programming and a detailed brief on target groups.

A marketing campaign turned into a branding campaign has at least three stages, two of them in planning the preparation stage (Newman, 1994):

1. Market segmentation: evaluating the needs, defining consumer types, defining target groups;
2. Positioning: evaluating the strong and weak points of the product, evaluating the competitors, targeting the groups, developing a brand image; and
3. Defining and executing the strategy: defining the product, creating the push marketing strategy, creating the pull marketing strategy, poll/public opinion research, organizational development and leadership.

### *3.1. Evaluating the product and the competitors*

During the process of city branding the existing values need to be revealed and, in certain cases, they need to be invented. Then, they can be ranked and built into brand pillars, planning the way they will contribute to the positioning of the city, regardless of the economic or social profile. The construction process follows the classical steps from the premises to the assessment of the situation and of competition (Ollins, 2008; Keller, 1998).

1. Premises;
2. Strengths, facilities;
3. Weak points, deficiencies;
4. Development points, potential;
5. Competition and competitiveness; and
6. Long-term objectives, brand objectives.

A situation analysis often stops after the assessment of the features and shortcomings, but this is not enough for branding. Values and often even the problems have to be compared with those of the surrounding municipalities and regions, and when we want to go internationally we need to compare them with settlements and regions from other countries. In the case of a unique value, we should identify those regions that have similar characteristics (e.g. wine regions, business centers, traditional crafts or traditional regions); while in the case of general values we need to analyze every similar settlement (e.g. educational or medical center). In the case of general characteristics and values, the principle of reservation will be applied: it depends on who is faster and more intense in achieving the association with a value. An already reserved value may still be built into a brand pillar and by intensive communication it may be seized and taken from other settlements but this needs a more organized construction and a higher involvement of resources.

Țirgu-Mureș is an example for value pillage. It used to be outstanding as a medical center and medical university, it was the cradle of modern emergency medical treatment (SMURD); nevertheless, by now Cluj-Napoca is mentioned as a primary location in a medical context. The city's theater and philharmonic orchestra were also outstanding, together with its famous musical, theater and puppetry schools, which, if not brought back to their previous place by recent changes, are outgrown by the companies and alternative offers of other towns (Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Sfântu Gheorghe). Its athletes were outstanding in Europe and worldwide, its sports performances and previous sports facilities were legendary, today it is one of the municipalities with the fewest sporting opportunities; one could carry on. The AlterNative film festival has been overtaken by Astra in Sibiu and TIFF in Cluj-Napoca (the latter brand has become so important that it positions the city on the international level), and since 2013 the most popular youth festival, Peninsula, has moved to Cluj-Napoca.

Although not impossible, branding is a difficult task for designers. They should define a stable position which may be assumed by the city's current situation in order to regain certain values. Especially because the parallel construction is spectacular



only within Transylvania, attracting international attention needs more cooperation (e.g. airports shall be connected, common medical centers shall be built). An increasing number of regions assume these tasks, the most spectacular cases within Eastern Europe are the case of Slovenia, the Croatian coastal tourism, or the campaign of Hungary timed for the rotating EU presidency, which was based on spas and medical tourism, and which harnessed this brand pillar in Eastern Europe.

### *3.2. Target groups of settlement branding*

Public institutions represent a unique group among the operators. They have the most diverse network of connections, with a different set of applicable rules regarding their communication, relationship building, transparency and operation. This network of connections includes groups in the widest meaning of the word, which can be interpreted as target groups because of the state representation.

The representative of the city in the city branding process is the City Council and the Mayor's Office. Nevertheless, the inner target group is not formed by the employees of the institution, which are the target of the organizational communication, but by the inhabitants of the city. On the one hand, the employees have an important role as a subgroup as they deliver information firsthand, while on the other hand they are easily reachable, as they are a closed target group in close connection with the institution. The largest target groups of the city branding will be the following:

1. Inner group: the inhabitants of the city
  - a. the employees of the public institutions and of the branding organization;
  - b. the permanent inhabitants of the city; and
  - c. the visitors of the city: guests, the ones who commute or visit.
2. Public institutions:
  - a. public institutions in direct subordination;
  - b. the local institutions representing the state public institutions; and
  - c. upper administrative or decision-making bodies.
3. The media:
  - a. local and regional media institutions with a direct connection; and
  - b. national and international media institutions.
4. Tourists:
  - a. regular visitors: ones who emigrated inland or abroad;
  - b. irregular visitors: ones who emigrated inland or abroad; and
  - c. transit-tourists.
5. Investors:
  - a. local and regional, usually small or medium-sized enterprises; and
  - b. national and international small or medium-sized enterprises or networks, multinational companies.
6. Non-Governmental Organizations, churches.

The target groups can be further detailed by determining in the communication or branding plan the weight of the different target groups, the channels through which

different types of messages need and are possible to be transmitted, and the intervals for transmission. Communication can also be direct or indirect; much information reaches the different groups through several agents, while the closer groups get it from several directions and more often.

In image-building and advertising it is important to consider the peculiarities of public institutions such as the handling of public funds, transparency or the elected bodies, which are more prudent regarding their own image, and on the other hand are exposed to the results of the election cycles.

As the local administration needs to reach several groups and target groups, intensive media use is frequent although, based on the author's experience in the Transylvanian context, the use of below the line instruments (BTL) is less common, and the web 2.0 possibilities (including social media) is almost not used. Nevertheless, this is seldom the result of the lack of expertise or failure; the real reasons are most frequently the lack of funds, being overwhelmed or the lack of good examples. It is important to mention the regulation according to which public institutions cannot spend money on advertising, thus their communication expenses need to be covered from other sources.

#### **4. Defining the project and the creative work**

As described in the introductory part, a city should be positioned, thus acquiring a special place in the eyes of the target group, and it should stand out from the rest of the cities. Positioning also incorporates emotional dimensions and assimilates the personal experiences, creating the brand insight. In this way, its ability to do so triggers the formation of associations in people's minds. This stage focuses on defining the uniqueness of the place and on identifying what makes that place special and different on the competitive market.

Finding the associations is a circumstantial process. They can be real, physically existing elements, stories, added values, habits, but all sorts of contents as well. The complexity of information, experiences and senses help the impulses to contribute to the general brand image (Kádár, 2013).

##### ***4.1. Auto- and hetero-stereotypes***

Preliminary expectations, experiences and the already existing information affect quite significantly the perception and the formation of the impression. Classification appears (meaning that the perceived regions, objects, people and events are classified), which helps individuals to get around better in the world, to think and express their judgments. Classification generates the formation of schemes. These are representations or memory structures referring to the behavior and knowledge of people, objects, events and situations. Finding the most appropriate scheme for any incoming information is called schema-based authentication, which allows us to successfully process a huge amount of incoming information. Thus, we do not need to store all the information concerning a new object or person as it is enough to encode and store the

most prominent features. Schema-based identification serves as a significant help in the orientation, perception of the environment and in processing the information. It moderates the acquisition of in-depth information, and allows judgments with a fixed content and based on a limited number of schemes. E.g. the schema-based authentication makes one of the strongest decisive elements when thinking about a region for choosing a family holiday. If there are no other influencing factors, such as recommendations or outstanding offers, the processed existing information will govern the decision.

Stereotypes are schemes formed about types, classes or groups of people. The term comes from Walter Lipmann, a journalist who thought of simple, schematic pictures and considered that through a system of assumptions we can create order in the environment surrounding the observer. According to a more complex interpretation, stereotypes are properties characterizing large social groups which are based on high-level consensus; they persist quite steadily in time.

Perception and the development of impressions are significantly influenced by auto and hetero-stereotype. Auto-stereotype is a stereotype used by a group to refer to it; a characteristic generalized to all members of the group. These characteristics are expressed both within the group and in the external communication; they can be measured, but they are characterized by a certain level of uncertainty, as a stereotype with which a group refers to itself does not match with the stereotype referred to the group by a different one, as in the case of hetero-stereotype<sup>1</sup>. General auto-stereotypes used by different analyses are, in fact, an idealistic self-description and often the expression of a desired picture as described by Le Vine and Campbell (Kádár, 2013).

1. We are proud of ourselves. We appreciate ourselves and the traditions of our ancestors.
2. We are faithful.
3. We are reliable and honest with each other but we shall not be fooled by the tricks of strangers.
4. We are brave and progressive minded. We stand up for our own, we defend what is ours and we cannot be gypped out of what is rightfully ours.
5. We love peace and people. We only hate our impenitent enemies.
6. We are fair and honest.

Hetero-stereotypes refer to groups that differ from the group of the observer or the interviewed person, and every characteristic that refers to the group will be regarded as one valid for each member of the group. This stereotype does not take into account the existence of sub-groups and differences between group members. We may frequently observe that the closer the observer is to the observed person's group, the more he/she is capable to set up sub-groups (ethnicity within a race, and within that

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1 The EthnoBarometer test series deal with the auto and hetero-stereotypes occurring within the inter-ethnic relations in Romania.

sub-groups related to a certain region or language, specific cultural and socialization characteristics or habits referring to a more restricted circle of the individual, etc.). A general stereotype may be set up in the case of a conflict consisting of the characteristics attributed to the observed group by the group in conflict as described by Le Vine and Campbell.

1. They are selfish and individualists. They consider that their kind have primary importance.
2. They stick together and shut out the others.
3. They deceive us as soon as they have the chance to. They are not honest; they lack any morality when it comes to us.
4. They are aggressive and expansionists. They want to step out to our detriment.
5. They are hateful and especially vicious towards us.
6. They are immoral and dishonest.

Stereotyping and its measurement help a lot in the branding process: it helps determining a group and its self-image; the set of values becomes measurable; characteristics and values can be formulated upon which a branding strategy can be built. On the other hand, hetero-stereotypes are practical to formulate the opinions of different outside target groups on a settlement, on a region and on the people living there<sup>2</sup>. Of course, stereotyping has its advantages and disadvantages. The results of the research analyzing the image, symbols and the identity will be relevant only to a part of the community, and can create repulsion in another community. With the multiethnic and multicultural environment of Transylvania characterized by deep gaps it is recommended to have representative researches when using stereotype-based value definition.

The aims as well as the auto- and hetero-stereotypes change when they are presented to outsiders, and the citizens of certain regions would rather identify with the indicated brand values. They may appear in a uniform manner in front of foreign visitors, regardless of whether they are tourists, investors, institutions or guests to events (sports events, for instance, do not hide their community building intentions and are very aware of their branding potential). Similar to the case of the associations described above related to positioning, each group or community may be associated with a certain symbol, but a symbol may also refer to a certain group. Branding a region is suitable for this purpose as well, and besides the spontaneous association of Dracula with Transylvania other symbols could be developed which would brand the community or the nation (Ollins, 2003). As long as they are not clearly identified, we cannot speak of a uniform brand regarding Transylvania, but the processes of

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2 The hetero-stereotypes are essential in measuring the settlement or country brand value. The leading evaluation methods relevant for Romania are the Anholt Nation Brands Index, the Country Brand Index and the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report.

self-expression as well as those aiming at the expression of a certain identity may be considered a good sign.

#### *4.2. From values to brand*

The practice of branding encompasses five elements: positioning, storytelling, design, price and customer relations (Healey, 2008). The order is not random, self-definition is followed by the display of elements which are essential in the case of city branding as well.

Positioning requires the identification of those values which clearly characterize the city, symbols with which they are willing to associate themselves. Practically, any characteristic may become a symbol. For example, many Transylvanian settlements already have their own characteristic features that can be transformed into a symbol:

- permanent adjectives, e.g. City of Treasures;
- traditions, e.g. the center of wood carvers and pottery;
- natural resources, e.g. city of the Bear Lake, the region of thermal spas and sparkling water springs;
- built heritage, e.g. Black Church, Sas-palace;
- the birthplace of famous personalities, e.g. the birthplace of King Matthias, the village of Lucian Blaga, the city of the Bolyai family;
- institutions, e.g. theaters, opera, medical college;
- places of historic events, e.g. battles like the one at Câmpul Pâinii; and
- places of spiritual life, e.g. the places of pilgrimage in Alba Iulia or Șumuleu Ciuc/Csiksomlyó.

Association is a bidirectional process. On the one hand, one instantly thinks to a settlement when stating a value (e.g. the celebration center of the national holiday of Romania or the place of the Pentecost Pilgrimage). On the other hand, by thinking to a settlement or region this should be the first association (top of the mind) (e.g. Băile Felix – thermal spa, Praid – salt mine). This is partly due to the spontaneous image and brand development, but in many cases this is not enough and a conscious brand development is necessary.

The geographical and historical features of certain settlements create many opportunities; these places boast with a multitude of symbols and values. For example, the current geopolitical situation of Cluj-Napoca makes it almost compulsory the center of the region, therefore the brand is based on its 'Capital of Transylvania' status. The first two years of the branding process consist almost entirely in the definition of the values, which should be examined from the point of view of the current social features, e.g. from the point of view of ethnic groups. First as a Roman settlement, then as a free royal town, Cluj-Napoca experienced each stage of Transylvanian history. The ideologies, arts, crafts and institutions created in the course of its history define its current status. In a mature community multiculturalism is considered a value, but in Cluj-Napoca it triggers the difficulties of branding as well. Therefore, we thought that in Cluj-Napoca multiculturalism may serve as an axis for branding (Cluj-Napoca City

Hall, 2011). Being present both in the historical and actual context, multiculturalism cannot be overlooked or forgotten. It is also in line with the principles of the European Union<sup>3</sup> which may provide additional opportunities for the city<sup>4</sup>. As Cluj-Napoca has many other values as well as a series of unique symbols, the branding strategy may distinguish four different pillars in branding: economy, culture, education and sports. This way, it will position itself by pointing out a value for each pillar, while the elements are embedded into the historical background and linked through various programs.

If there are no obvious symbols to form the essence of the brand, the responsibility of assuming heritage disappears and we have the freedom to invent, allocate and develop highly structured fictional values and attributes. One such example is Sfântu Gheorghe; its values are well known to the inhabitants of the city and the region around it. The symbol in this case may be the name of the saint whose name the city bears, but today for the inhabitants of Transylvania the very first association related to this city is the Saint George Festival, a series of events which focuses the attention on the city, highlights its potential as a destination for mass tourism and may emphasize values which are difficult to identify from distance. Due to the festival the city's receptiveness and capacity increases and becomes more flexible, thus it can provide space for other events (a good example is the Reflex Theatre Festival, which is slowly switching from a product name to a brand). Thus, the city gains a place on the mental map of consumers and acquires a place among the cities and cultural destinations of Transylvania.

Similar tactics were used in Sibiu which, due to its Saxon historical heritage had a relatively well-defined, solitary place on mental maps but this was strengthened by a well-organized, powerful series of programs, and together with Luxembourg, the city became the European Capital of Culture in 2007. This title brought a substantial development support and the possibility for institutional and infrastructural expansion as well as intensive media attention, consolidating the city's position in the country and drawing international attention. By the end of the year the repositioned city decided to keep organizing certain events, developed a series of continuous activities thus ensuring a continuous flux of visitors, and, by exploiting this new status, launched a strong cultural and economic development.

## 5. Endnote

Although the city branding process is complex, it can be divided into stages and steps; the synergy of the activities is difficult to measure and it is hardly predictable

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3 The first slogan of the European Union, All different, all equal, in 2000 was replaced by the Latin *In varietate concordia*, meaning *Unity in Diversity*. The presence and interpretation of this slogan goes back to taoism: unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation.

4 In 2015 Cluj-Napoca is going to be the Youth Capital of Europe and will have the opportunity to become the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2021.

and measurable. According to the classic dilemma of advertising, never knowing which of the key elements led to the results achieved, the branding activities face the same question (Kádár, 2010). As it is a time-consuming process aiming to change the awareness level, attitudes, actions and habits, the results will be seen over time.

Even if the city and regional branding has become a well-known procedure with visible positive outcomes in the last three decades, most of the LPAs of the Romanian settlements do not see the need for branding. There are development plans made not for executing and seeking their benefit but because there is demand for them from a higher administrative level or are created to fulfill a compulsory requirement. This applies to the city branding attempts as well; in most of the cases they offer public visibility for LPA leaders but they are never implemented. It might be a programming concept, as all five country branding attempts ended up in a major scandal. Of course there are exceptions, such as the cases of some municipalities, Transylvanian county seats such as Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca or Sfântu Gheorghe we were working with, or another 30-something other municipalities all across Romania. Having a clearly defined city branding process as described above and a growing number of specialists in the field, the number of branded settlements will most certainly grow.

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