

# PLACE BRANDING AS EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT\*

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## Abstract

The economic liberalism, globalization and more recently the economic crisis are general phenomena leading to changes of territorial management practices. Within these practices, place marketing and branding are of crucial importance in promoting an image of the city and bringing some added value to a place. Although an emerging challenging problem for local authorities, few scholars are currently addressing the subject, in terms of delivering a branding *modus operandi* for the practitioners, be they local authorities or private agencies. The present paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the most recent writings showing how product marketing techniques apply to place marketing, with an emphasis on city branding, presenting the manner in which the place branding process was improved in two of the most representative cities of Transylvania: Sibiu and Cluj-Napoca. The paper's main objective is to highlight the role of territorial marketing which can become, through one of its components, namely place branding, an important trigger for the local communities development by the means of strategic planning. In this respect, the present work displays an overview of some of the most illustrative theoretical models regarding city branding, an insight on the Romanian city branding process within the two aforementioned cities and, finally, some brief recommendations regarding the place and the role of branding process for local authorities. The paper assumes that although place branding is an efficient tool for promoting a territory's identity (already proven in several European cities), Romania is at the beginning of this process. The few significant achievements (the ones from Sibiu and Cluj-Napoca being the most notable) still cannot make the most of their urban identities and values, neither at national, nor at international level. Last but not least, this kind of papers might raise some awareness among local stakeholders on the importance of these somehow new techniques.

**Keywords:** strategic planning, territorial management, place marketing, place branding, local government.

## 1. Introduction

Although there is a great abundance of high quality papers on urban and regional marketing, the specific academic literature seems to be quite fuzzy when it comes to understanding the role that different actors play in writing or rewriting a place branding strategy. This is mostly due to a relevant diversity of stakeholders involved in the planning process in different national and regional political systems.

This study consists of two main parts: 1. some theoretical considerations referring to the content and the bearing of the place branding concept, to the way one shifted from product to place branding, and to the importance of city branding as a comprehensive tool integrated into the city marketing policies and practices ensemble illustrated with several European good practices (sections 2, 3 and 4); 2. an overview of the city branding process in Romania with a focus on the achievements of Sibiu and Cluj-Napoca, whose local governments clearly stood out at national level, by the means of a quite methodical and diverse place branding process (section 5). Finally, the paper draws some conclusions and recommendations regarding the implementation of place branding concepts and tools.

The economic liberalism, globalization and more recently the economic crisis are general phenomena which lead to changes of territorial management practices. In order to be put into practice, the new spatial development concepts are more often passing the theoretical line. Thus, the corporate management and product marketing concepts, as competitive advantages of different economic actors and products, have slowly gained a spatial dimension as a tighter competition between places occurred. Nowadays, in the context of 'economic studies', collectivities of different ranks and sizes are engaging into an ever increasing competition for residents, investors and tourists. Thus, local governments have to develop and implement place management models derived from corporate management. Assigning a strategic dimension to the territory's development plans is a must in order to acquire territorial management efficiency. Hence, the strategic planning process implies a long-term 'design' of a territory's future in the guise of the local development strategy (vision, objectives, measures and actions), which concentrates on the sustainable capitalization of all the territory's assets. According to the economic model, one of the core components of an efficient territorial management is territorial or place marketing. In promoting a place on the 'places market' more and more local governments are launching a place branding process in order to attract more residents, investors and tourists. One can see this as a translation of product branding into public administration area and the emergence of new territorial management models with an entrepreneurial touch, particularly within urban management (Ilmonen, 2007, p. 35), as successful city branding examples are already quite visible.

Obviously, product branding can only be applied to certain territories, especially cities, in a refined, adapted form. The most important aspects that restrain the application of this approach are: different actors with different interests, difficulty in negoti-

ating the local common values, respect for the historical identity of a place, diversity of a city brand consumers related to regular products consumers diversity (Jensen and Ole *apud* Ilmonen, 2007). If well designed and managed, a city's brand can first of all represent a strategic advantage over other competing cities and a social cohesion enhancement instrument (Ilmonen, 2007, p. 36), without being however, a territorial management solution itself.

## **2. Conceptual framework of local branding.**

### **From product branding to place branding and city branding**

Marketing and branding places are important engagements among territorial management measures that local public authorities are in the process of developing. If we view territorial management as a particular process of developing and implementing public policies (Hernandez, 2003, p. 4), we can easily see that cultural promotion and development is listed besides land-use planning, transportation, housing, urban renewal and reconversion of derelict land and brownfield sites, environmental protection, waste management, energy and water supply, provision of services and facilities, economic development, social cohesion and integration, protection and enhancement of the cultural heritage etc. (Council of Europe, 2006). The above cited document is addressing the urban management problematic as listed in the papers of CEMAT 2003 stating that 'cities have also to promote their competitiveness and their image in order to develop functions with high economic added value and to attract investments' (Council of Europe, 2006, p. 21).

In the foreword chapter of a recent book about place branding (Moilanen and Rainistro, 2009), professor Philip Kotler of the International Marketing Kellogg School of Management describes marketing as a 'universal process that can be applied to developing and promoting many entities, including products, services, experiences, places, persons, properties, ideas, causes and information'.

A generally accepted definition describes marketing as the process that 'directs those activities that involve the creation and distribution of products to identified markets' (Stevens *et al.*, 2006, p. 5). Arguing that marketing 'directs', the authors admit that this is an active management practice, with clear tasks such as creating high value products and bringing them to a previously identified target-group.

Moilanen and Rainistro (2009, p. 6) describe the brand as 'an impression perceived in a client's mind of a product or a service'. The authors assert that the brand is 'the sum of all tangible and intangible elements, which makes the selection unique'. Branding a product, a service or a company means promising it to the masses, making it desirable for a target group. According to the authors, the three essential concepts related to brands are identity, image and communication. The first one relies on the intrinsic value that an existing brand has or, is given, in case of new brands. On the other hand, the brand image is the appearance that has developed into the target group's perception. Communication refers to the means of making a brand's attractive factors visible for the target audience. As 'a brand is created in consumer's mind'

the authors stressed out some of the benefits of brands, such as:

- ‘A brand separates itself from competing products;
- A brand creates emotional benefits for the customer;
- Brand facilitates the customer’s decision-making;
- A brand protects the organization’s marketing and brings long-term strategic benefits;
- A brand can support innovations and be the ‘main thread’;
- A brand enables the connection of responsibility to the producer;
- A strong company brand connects personnel and business partners so it is possible to develop stronger relationships and ensure long-term investments;
- Brands increase the efficiency of marketing operations and strengthen the process that creates more financial value;
- A business brand connects all goodwill-value derived from doing business;
- A brand guarantees quality; and
- A brand increases turnover’ (Moilanen and Rainistro, 2009, pp. 7-8).

Analyzing all the arguments listed above, one can agree that all of these branding benefits applying to commercial products or services are valid for places provided that there is a promoter (local, regional or central government) and a receiver (inhabitants, businesses or tourists) (Moilanen and Rainistro, 2009).

Nowadays, more and more places, and especially cities, are engaged in a competition process. In order to enhance visibility and attractiveness, a strategic planning process is set in which place marketing plays a key role. In a wide sense, place marketing is quite similar to product marketing, yet Moilanen and Rainistro (2009, p. 1) claim that special attention should be paid when branding complex, multidimensional entities such as countries, cities or tourist resorts. The authors are also noting that only an integrated approach would significantly increase place competitiveness by encouraging exports, bringing tourists and tourism incomes, attracting competent workforce and investments, and last but not least it would improve the operational preconditions of public diplomacy.

Hospers (2004, p. 274) suggests that ‘place marketing closes the gap between what an area really is (identity), what outsiders think about it (image) and how the location wants to be known in the outside world (its brand or desired reputation). This is mainly done by the means of place branding. According to Hankinson (2001, p. 1), the practice of branding locations such as countries, regions, cities and towns, is an ever increasing process.

### **3. City marketing and city branding. Importance of city branding**

According to Kavaratzis (2004, p. 59), place marketing has been a defining entrepreneurial feature of urban governance. Place marketing applies to countries, regions (including supra-local associations), cities or tourist destinations. Within place marketing, cities have the most important position, resulting that city branding is one of the most frequent forms of place branding. The major reason for this statement is

that regional or rural entities have much more stakeholders involved in the process, and the management share is not always clearly defined. Furthermore, newly created territorial cooperation structures have little or no common identity (though it is supposed that they are to be created upon common identity features for common goals), making the marketing process a quite difficult task.

However, cities also are confronted with several target and stakeholders groups. Although the main target group of a city seems to be its own residents, one should not consider less important other target groups like visitors and investors (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 66). The author stresses out that the municipality's most important goal is to improve their quality of life by doing all cultural, economic, social and tourist activities in the name of the city's residents.

Already in 1988, Ashworth and Voogd (*apud* Walker, 2000, p. 74), described place marketing as 'specific planning actions designed to improve the relative market position of cities with regard to particular activities'. The success of a place marketing strategy is based on factors such as: a community based vision, a reliable analysis of the city's strengths and weaknesses, the identification of the target-groups, analysis of the competition and the identification of the city's strongest assets as 'selling points' (Walker, 2000, p. 76).

A crucial role in city marketing is played by image formulation and communication (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 62). According to Sager (2011, p. 157), place marketing strategies encompass place branding and place promoting.

Kavaratzis (2004, p. 70) is adding a strong social dimension to the branding process by describing city branding as 'the means both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investment and tourism, and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of citizens with their city and activating all social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest'. On the other hand, Vanolo (2008, p. 371) argues that some promotional policies may result in real estate speculative development, gentrification and the enhancement of specific neighborhoods. However, it is a fact that gentrified and up-scale residential districts are often used in promotion of cities (Sager, 2011, p. 157). Building up more gated communities (saw as safe and exclusive housing) and shopping (privatized urban space) is an attempt to attract the 'creative class', which is a 'fashionable target' for city marketing around the turn of the century. For another important target group, business leaders, the most important arguments are economic development incentives and business-friendly zones (Sager, 2011).

Sager (2011, p. 157) states that there are several reasons standing behind city marketing, but the most important are the changes in the global economy that lead to a declining manufacturing base in many North American and West European cities. According to the author, the local authorities felt a need to become more competitive, meaning 'far more innovative and entrepreneurial'. Within the context of capital liberalization (with its pros and cons), cities have to compete now both in terms of retain-

ing existing investments and 'to attract footloose international investments, tourist flows, consumers and public-sector funding'.

In a paper on the impact of a major disaster (Hurricane Katrina) to a city's image, Gotham (2007, p. 828) asserts that branding strategies have to define the local attractions of a city, differentiate it from the competitors in the visitors' minds and create a 'promise' that frames the destination experience for visitors. In the author's opinion, the main goals of urban branding are to 'reimagine a city, forge place-based identities and control consumer impressions and understanding of a particular locale'.

#### 4. City brand architecture

Reimagining a city is a long process which implies first of all a sound analysis of past and present mental representations of a specific place, existing tangible and non-tangible assets, existing and projected competition and target-groups, citizens' needs and aspirations. Riza, Doratli and Fasli (2012, p. 294) define identity as the 'distinction which is obvious and visible at first sight, as well as strong as creating images on people's mind even who haven't seen it before', thus 'each city has a unique identity, which is composed of images and memories that are either negative or positive'. According to Grodach (2009, p. 186), the image of a city is formed by both built environment and cultural events and activities. The most important of the physical images are downtown cityscapes, public art, infrastructure and industry, historic infrastructure, parks and landscaping, historic and non-historic flagship buildings and places, convention facilities, themed environments/amusement parks, spectator sports and facilities. Regarding the immaterial images, the most representative for city branding are arts and culture, signature events, heritage and ethnic events, and symbols, gastronomy, sport events.

Secondly, the city branding process requires a common involvement of the city authorities, local population and the business community. Altogether, they have to make proof of a 'great deal of creativity' in order to provide the right answers to the questions: Which target groups to focus on? What sort of activities should be employed in the strategy? How should the city be advertised to the outside world? (Hospers, 2003, p. 262)

The place branding process implies several strategic decisions (Rainistro *apud* Azevedo, 2004, p. 1780) such as: (1) the choice of the brand's name (usually a city's or a region's name); (2) the brand positioning in the market in relation to the competition; and (3) the marketing program-objectives, strategies and tactics.

In a quite comprehensive attempt to integrate the most illustrative of the place branding frameworks, Kavaratzis (2009, pp. 30-35) shows what the components of a branding strategy are and how are they put in practice. The eight premises that the author suggests to be the 'components of an integrated approach' are:

- vision and strategy (chosen vision for the city's future and development of a clear strategy to realize it);
- internal culture (spreading a brand orientation through the city management and marketing itself);

- local communities (prioritizing local needs; involving local residents, entrepreneurs and businesses in developing and delivering the brand);
- synergies (gaining agreement and support of all relevant stakeholders and providing for balanced participation);
- infrastructure (providing for basic needs without which the city cannot attempt delivering the expectations created by its brand);
- cityscape and gateways (the ability of the built environment to represent itself and reinforce or damage the city's brand);
- opportunities (opportunities available for targeted individuals [urban lifestyle, good services, education etc.] and companies [financial, labor etc.], which signify the potential of the place); and
- communications (fine-tuning all intentionally communicated messages).

According to the author, the order of components reveals an ongoing process, starting with the debate conducted by the relevant authority of the city over the vision and the strategy that the city should adopt. The process goes on with a spread of the brand-oriented culture throughout the organization itself, and the involvement of the local communities for the refinement of the brand vision and strategy. Subsequently, synergies with all relevant stakeholders must be found, and all tangible and non-tangible assets, such as infrastructure, cityscapes and opportunities, should be discussed with the targeted audience. Last but not least, all the opportunities should be communicated and promoted. The two essential elements the author feels the need to stress out regarding this process are that (a) external and internal research and analysis are necessary at all stages in order to create and maintain a necessary connection with all relevant audiences, and (b) strong leadership needs to be exercised in order to guarantee consistency and effectiveness.

Azevedo (2004, pp. 1782-1783) proposes another city branding theoretical framework for public policy makers, which is a four stages process derived from Aaker's (1996) brand identity planning model (see Figure 1).

The first level implies a SWOT analysis. The second level is about defining the brand identity in terms of 'tangible/functional attributes and emotional/representational benefits' in order to build a relationship between the city brand and the targeted market. The third level refers to the city image formation, and includes the making of the brand communicating strategy, choosing the marketing factors and the brand monitoring. The fourth level of the process is the 'fruits harvesting' stage, where the city brand becomes an economic development factor, by attracting investors, tourists and citizens, and last but not least a territorial cohesion factor, by transferring image from place to product and increasing citizens' sense of belonging and self-esteem.

A third *modus operandi* for city branding is a three stage process developed by Heeley (2011, pp. 17-25). As an experienced practitioner, being involved for almost 20 years in the branding process of four British cities – Sheffield, Coventry, Birmingham and Nottingham, the author asserts that the three distinct phases of the branding process are development, launch and implementation. The first phase is the most costly

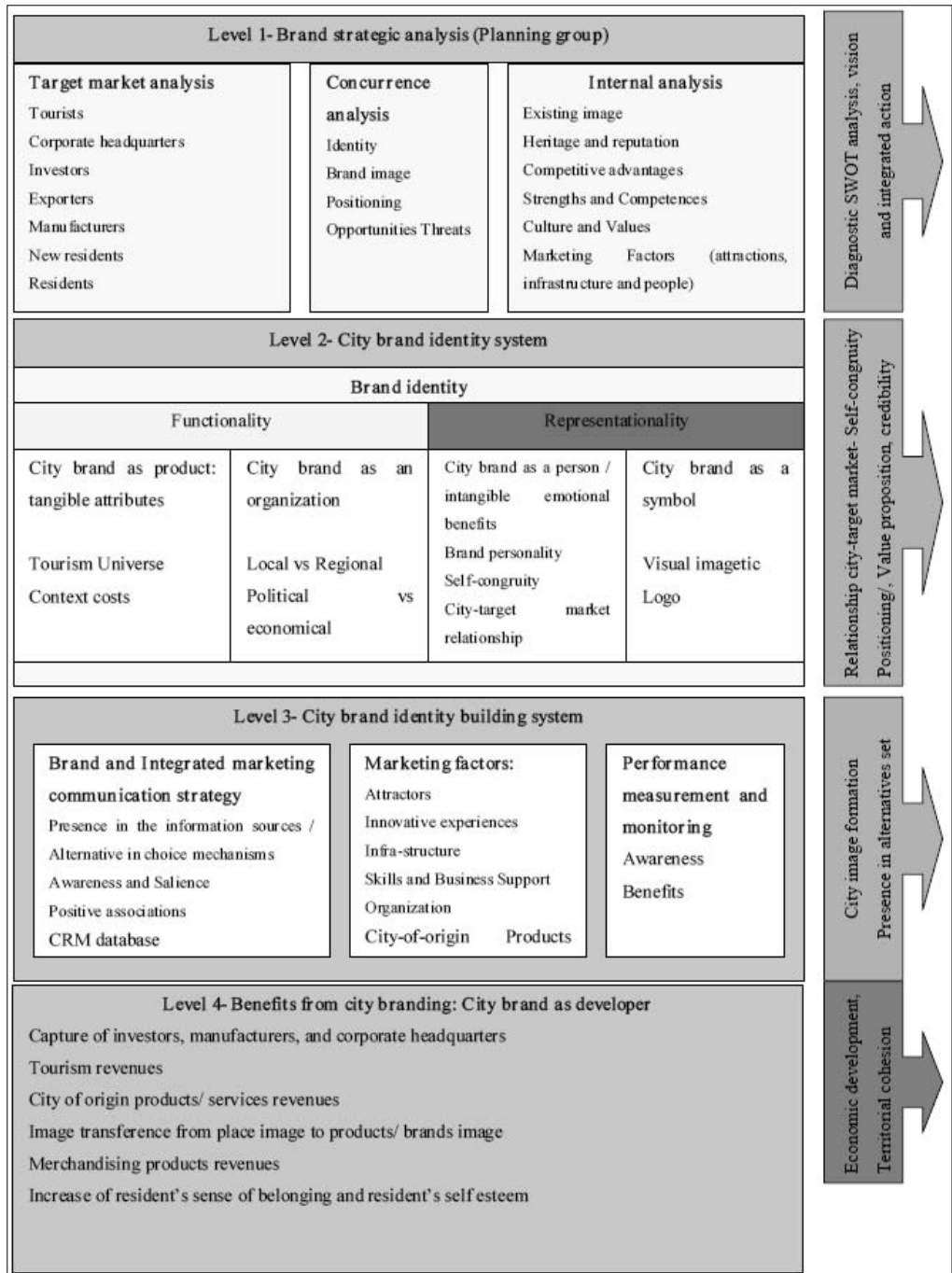


Figure 1: City branding strategy model

Source: Azevedo (2004)



and implies the development of what the author calls ‘the city brand platform’. The city brand platform consists of the seven components of a city brand, which are core values, logo, slogans, font, language, color palette and signature images.



Figure 2: Example of logos and slogans for Edinburgh and Copenhagen

Source: Heeley (2011)

Gotham (2007, p. 828) shows that among the strategic efforts to identify a city’s image and create a unique personality, appealing slogans such as ‘Live Large, Think Big’ (Dallas), ‘City of Angels’ (Los Angeles) and ‘Country Music Capital of the World’ (Nashville) were created, as part of the repertoire of urban local branding.

Development of a city brand platform usually begins with the issuing of a brief-to-tender, as an invitation for the graphic professionals’ bids (usually design agencies). The second phase consists in the formal launch of the city brand, and it is intended to create ‘initial awareness and acceptance’. When launching a city brand the branding authority invites the stakeholders, the appointed design company and the media to an event, like opening event, featuring presentations, books, photo albums and the brand website. However, the author stresses out that as well organized as it can be, an event like this doesn’t really succeed in achieving a widespread awareness and acceptance because usually it is of little or no interest to the regional, national or international media. On the other hand, local media focuses on negative or potentially negative



Figure 3: Posters advertising Alsace Region, France

Source: <http://id-reel.blogspot.ro/2011/05/alsace-territorial-marketing-advert.html>

aspects of the brand, such as the costs the local residents have to pay or the physical aspect of the logo or the message derived from the slogan. The implementation phase represents an integrated program of brand application consisting of two categories. The first one is called 'city dressing' and it is about infrastructural applications: banners, posters, billboards, screens, buses and floral displays. The second one is about the marketing materials such as brochures, guides, videos, websites, t-shirts, pens, badges etc. (Heeley, 2011, pp. 17-25).

Although the three models presented above emphasize different components and stages of the branding process, it is the task of local administration representatives to choose the right 'model', based on the unique identity of the territory and the city's image they want to promote both to local and outside target groups.

### 5. An overview of city branding in Romania

Although clearly defined by scholars in the 1990s and integrated within the local development strategies of major cities from abroad immediately after, in Romania the branding process is not yet perceived as an important tool in the context of the global territorial competition.

Only a few cities have started to develop some branding initiatives. This study takes into account the results concerning the place branding in two of the most representative cities of Transylvania – Sibiu and Cluj-Napoca – due to the following reasons. First, both cities have a strong and vivid historical and cultural identity that comes from ancient times. The settlement of Napoca was built shortly after the Roman conquest of Dacia (101-106 A.D), while Sibiu was only mentioned at the beginnings of the XII century. Besides their unique architectural and cultural patrimony, the social, economic and educational systems have also a certain potential brand identity. Second, the two cities offer the most relevant place branding processes in Romania, obtained with the support of a coherent local city marketing policy implemented by the local actors. We hope that the results obtained here could provide useful models to be explored and specifically adjusted to other cities. Sibiu was the first in benefitting from a European initiative, namely European Capital of Culture in 2007, starting though to forge an international image and identity, which allowed a proper capitalization of its valuable complex heritage.

The local authorities placed a great emphasis on the physical renewal of the cities' historical center by conducting major building refurbishment projects, and creating public open spaces and green spaces. Together with the physical renewal, the cultural dimension of the multiethnic city was successfully illustrated in its diverse cultural agenda. Seeing that Sibiu was designated as European Capital of Culture, we can ar-



Figure 4: The logo and slogan of Sibiu as European Capital of Culture 2007

Source: <http://www.sibiu2007.ro>

gue that the city branding process was rather a spontaneous, contextual one, derived from the local government's efforts to respond to this designated status. We can argue therefore that Sibiu did not have a planned city branding process, designed to raise the city's attractiveness, but a casual, event related one. However, no matter what means they used to promote the city, the increased visibly triggered its development. The immediate advantages of the initiative were a significant tourist flow, both from abroad and from Romania, new businesses, and an increasing economic welfare. The image gained through this event related branding process placed Sibiu on the map of Romania's and Europe's cultural cities.

Learning from Sibiu's lesson, one can notice a multiplying effect, mostly in the case of major cities of Romania that are interested in integrating event/product related branding into city branding.

Earlier than others, the local administration of Cluj-Napoca understood the importance of a territorial development vision and brand as a marketing tool intended to be integrated into a strategic planning process. The development strategy of the city of Cluj-Napoca highlights the lack of a local brand as a weakness, showing the weak image and low advertising of the city's interests at both national and international level: 'This fact is due to the lack of community defined strategic objectives and to the existent drawbacks related to the creation of a marketing system capable to forge a local brand and to sell the city's assets both on national and international scale' (Strategia de Dezvoltare a Municipiului Cluj-Napoca, 2006, pp. 25-26). The strategic guidelines of the document show that the local actors understood the need to create a city brand. One of the objectives of goal 'drafting an investment attraction program' is 'creation of a local brand – capitalization of local resources and traditions through a prime image for specific products' (Strategia de Dezvoltare a Municipiului Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 29). Another proposal within the same document relates to a freestanding project 'The drafting of Cluj-Napoca's brand and the website Touristic Cluj' (Strategia de dezvoltare a Municipiului Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 36), as a task for the future Tourism Office (Strategia de Dezvoltare a Municipiului Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 184). One can make the difference between a complex, integrated advertising of the city within the first initiative and a more sectoral, touristic approach within the second.

The same document is proposing the following strategic vision: 'Cluj-Napoca will be an innovation and opportunities center, an attractive touristic destination, a pleasant place to live, work and study, a city with open and responsible local authorities, with active citizens and dynamic and involved business environment' (Strategia de Dezvoltare a Municipiului Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 3); this shows the multidimensional ambitions of the city. Achieving this strategic vision requires an integrated and complex branding process, capable of integrating all the addressed goals.

The first steps in the branding process were taken in 2009 by the municipality together with AIESEC Cluj within the Branding Cluj project intending to allow students to present their own city branding strategy proposals ([http://primariacj.ro/Comunicate%5Cprimi-pasi\\_2009-5-10.aspx](http://primariacj.ro/Comunicate%5Cprimi-pasi_2009-5-10.aspx)). The process went on with a public de-

bate named Branding Cluj-Napoca in 2010, reuniting scholars, cultural, political and local administration, advertising agencies and NGOs' representatives (<http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/comunicate.html?gId=114>). The initiative generated several logos and slogans proposals, as listed below.

<p>a) The integrated approach: Diversity and choice</p>	
<p>b) The historical approach: The heart of Transylvania</p>	
<p>c) The subjective-emotional approach: Cluj charms you</p>	
<p>d) The personal approach: A part of your life</p>	
<p>e) The communicative approach: The open city</p>	





<p>f) The legendary approach: The treasure city of Transylvania</p>	
<p>g) The three-dimensional approach: Cluj-Napoca – university city; Cluj-Napoca – multicultural city; Cluj-Napoca – business friendly city.</p>	
<p>h) The integrated approach: The image of a modern town.</p>	
<p>i) The touristic approach: The tourist city</p>	

Figure 5: The logos and slogans elaborated for Branding Cluj-Napoca, 2010

Source: a-f - <http://imagnetact.blogspot.ro/2010/02/despre-brand-despre-cluj-napoca-intre.html>; g - <http://www.trendcommunication.ro/www/?p=721>; h - <http://pastuhov.ro/a-new-image-for-cluj/>; i - [www.visitclujnapoca.ro](http://www.visitclujnapoca.ro)

Therefore, inclusion of the city branding objective in the strategic planning documents of Cluj-Napoca and the initiatives already undertaken for creating the city brand illustrate that the municipality understood the importance of the process for the future development of the city. However, the current brand has a sectoral touristic approach, as illustrated by the two websites ([www.visitcluj.ro/](http://www.visitcluj.ro/) and [www.visitclujnapoca.ro/](http://www.visitclujnapoca.ro/)), and it disregards the other target groups that the city brand should address, namely citizens, investors and students.

Unlike Sibiu, where we witnessed a spontaneous, event related branding process, in the case of Cluj-Napoca one can notice the commitment of local actors for the ter-

ritorial management approach within the branding process. However, the incipient nature of this kind of territorial management approach in Romania results in a poor legibility of the employed methodology. At this point, the city has a clear development vision, several logos and slogan proposals, and two websites. As a conclusion, we conclude that the branding process of Cluj-Napoca is an evolving one, lacking some clear criteria that would facilitate the selection of the most representative identity elements, shared by both the local community and investors, and in accordance with the strategic vision.

## **6. Discussions and recommendations**

As we emphasized in the literature review, it is generally accepted that place and especially city branding are some of the most important measures regarding territorial management that local public authorities should take. There are certainly a lot of discussions related to this topic and some recommendations to be made. In the following part we want to stress the most important recommendations in our opinion. Based on tradition, the large European cities are clearly placing a relevant weight on the city branding process in promoting a designed image of the city and the impact the brand has on local development. More recently, and, therefore, less developed, there are some positive examples in Romania that eloquently illustrate the positive impact of selling a certain image for the urban development. The plainest example is the case of Sibiu, which has largely taken advantage of the event-related branding process, European Capital of Culture. On the other hand, the case of Cluj-Napoca is a completely different situation because local government understood the relevance of strategic planning for urban management, and placed a great emphasis on city branding as an appropriate city image promoting tool. Following the example of the two cities, other cities from Romania (Piatra Neamț, Alba Iulia, Bistrița, Baia Mare etc.) have started to conduct similar branding initiatives, highlighting a gradual awareness of the importance of city branding for the urban development.

Developing a city brand is a challenging and complex process due to the large number of stakeholders with different interests and visions regarding the future of the city. The process starts with balancing if a city is really ready to launch itself in such a competition or, on the contrary, if it can afford to stay out of it. Once the decision is made, the city's identity should be communicated in a way that it would generate a positive image both for the residents and local stakeholders (creating thus a sense of belonging and self-esteem), and for the outsiders, whoever they might be (prospective residents, investors, tourists or students). The next step is to establish the brand strategy, and once it has been developed, the city needs to act based on this strategy in order to ensure brand credibility. As a successful city brand is of common interest, the process must involve several actors, such as local government representatives, private sector, tourist operators and civil society, both in developing and managing/maintaining the city brand. Another important phase of the process is to promote and communicate the city brand, and it has to be done differently for

different target groups. Be it media, advertising or events, promotion and communication of the city brand has to be as efficient as possible. Press releases are most efficient for the initial launch of a brand, while continuous advertising is most suitable for maintaining brand's visibility on local, regional, national and international scale. Hosting major events such as Olympic Games or Eurovision Song Contest is a strategy that boosts a city's brand, making the city visible worldwide. Last but not least, a city branding process is a continuous undertaking, meaning that the brand should evolve together with the city's development. Creative cities develop due to their brand strategies, but they have to make sure that they both remain constant to the core values while identifying new aims and objectives, and they provide the brand with some flexibility, allowing it to adapt to occurring changes. Factors that contribute to an effective brand management are professional and political maturity of the stakeholders, complexity and flexibility of the strategy, and finally feedback analysis and continuous monitoring.

Considering the degree of uniqueness of cities and the great number of factors that contribute to such a broad demarche, strict and explicit recommendations are somehow difficult to enlist in a paper that tackles the overall problematic of place branding. However, there are at least two important things for the public authority representatives when engaging in a city branding process. First, close attention has to be paid to closing the gap between the identity of the city and its image. This means that branding authority has to be very careful not to promote something they cannot deliver. Assigning innovative features to a city without supporting them by sound connections between academic environment (research and development are especially to be evidenced) and territorial management probably will not attract any investor or will not be a sustainable strategy over the long term. Likewise, advertising a city's physical enlargement potential to prospect residents is not enough without comprehensive, sustainable urban plans, altogether with delivering the adequate physical and social amenities. Valuable visiting places or objectives are unlikely to be sustainably managed and developed without appropriate infrastructure.

The second important aspect to consider is doing it right for the first time! Doing it right means that first of all the local government has to be aware that branding a city is a process with several phases. Respecting them means passing through all of them in the right order, without missing any of them. Right for the first time means that it is easier and surely cheaper to implement the strategy right from the beginning. When saying cheaper, one should not think only at initial costs but at subsequent costs, derived from a potential harm done to the city's image by misleading measures, too.

In consequence, there is no such thing as a branding success formula or a guarantee that a branding strategy will work properly under different circumstances, but each city has to develop its own unique brand according to its values and its aims, trying to use all its assets at their best.

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