



FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS HUMANAS Y SOCIALES

## **Nation Branding as an instrument for public diplomacy**

An analysis of Romania's nation brand building

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***Resumen:***

El alumno analizará el concepto de Nation Branding, como estrategia para promover la imagen de un país de cara a la sociedad internacional. Se investigará, como caso de estudio, la agenda del gobierno rumano para implementar su estrategia de nation branding, y sus efectos sobre la imagen del país, como herramienta de diplomacia pública. El análisis buscara entender la diplomacia pública y sus nuevos instrumentos, que involucran nuevas formas de comunicación y tecnologías en el campo de la diplomacia.

***Palabras clave:***

Nation branding, diplomacia pública, Rumania, comunicación, diplomacia, imagen, estrategia.

***Summary:***

The student will analyse the concept of Nation Branding, as a strategy to promote the image of a country towards the international society. It will be analysed, as a case study, the Romanian government's agenda towards the implementation of a nation branding strategy, and its effects on the image of the country as a public diplomacy tool. The analysis will pursue understanding public diplomacy as a new form of diplomacy in contrast with traditional diplomacy and its new instruments, which involve modern forms of communication and technologies.

***Keywords:***

Nation branding, public diplomacy, Romania, communication, diplomacy, image, strategy.

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## **1. Introduction**

The modern understanding of the term *diplomacy* has dramatically turned around whilst orbiting around the phenomenon of globalisation. Traditional diplomacy, tendent to enable an effective communication between states, as main actors in international relations, began to give space to the concept of *public diplomacy*.

Certain countries were pioneers in the employment of *public diplomacy* tools that would enable them not only to reach foreign governments, but also to exert their influence over foreign populations. Diplomacy has been defined by numerous authors and academics over time, offering different interpretations to this term. Twentieth-century British diplomat, Harold Nicholson, considered diplomacy as “guiding international relations through negotiations, and the manner in which it manages ambassadors and envoys of these relations”. Contrastingly, *public diplomacy* offers a wider space for dialogue beyond the intervention of international agents accredited as diplomats by states.

Diplomatic practice has traditionally been centred on official bilateral or multilateral channels of communication between states (Nielsen Sigsgaard, 2011). We cannot argue that traditional diplomacy is unnecessary to conduct negotiations between states, in order to reach peaceful agreements and maintain friendly international relations. However, in the information era many instruments can be used to “win the hearts and minds of people” (Nye, 2008), which cannot be carried out through mere formal negotiations.

We are talking about *soft power*, attracting others to share your own vision of the direction to follow. Soft power goes hand in hand with hard power, giving as a result the so-called smart power, as supported by American political scientist Joseph Nye. This concept was defined by the Center for Strategic International Studies as “an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions of all levels to expand one's influence and establish legitimacy of one's action.”

In this workpiece, I will attempt to analyse nation branding as a form of expanding one's influence on other actors, as an instrument of public diplomacy. Modern tools such as, films, music or other cultural activities play an important role in influencing over the international public opinion. Such persuasive techniques, enable states to reach citizens via a competitive identity, occasionally transformed into a denominated nation or country brand (De San Eugenio Vela, 2012). To assess the effectiveness of national branding as part of the strategy for public diplomacy, I will examine the strategy of Romania towards building a unitary Nation Image.

## **2. Hypothesis**

Under the premises exposed above, diplomacy follows the aim of serving as a mean of communication between states. As it has been explained, diplomacy has experienced an evolution, lead by the technological advancements of the information era. This evolution has permitted a faster communication between nations, and the ability to reach not only governments, but also foreign populations. Diplomacy has widened its focus, not only to ensure friendly relations with foreign governments, but to influence these governments and their nationals. Today carrying out an active diplomacy isn't simply about establishing permanent embassies, it goes much further.

Therefore, most countries have developed strategies to follow this objective. However, it is difficult to narrow a specific definition of Nation Branding, which generally is identified with a westernised conception. It is important to consider the different perspectives of this concept, in order to generalise its applicability to both, developing and developed countries. Otherwise, it will remain considered as an instrument to exert power over less developed countries, under the influence of an international superpower, that possesses the resources to control other countries.

My thesis, orbits around how carrying out the mentioned strategies, as part of a country's foreign policy, actually helps countries to have an impact on other international actors. Performing actions to maintain negotiations, backing the mutual interest of different countries is genuinely effective. Once a country, perceives another country as

friendly, or appealing, negotiations become much easier, and even trade or tourism becomes benefited.

Therefore this paper will attempt at analysing how these strategies help to improve a country's image, using the example of Romania as a case study. Romania has traditionally had a negative image in the international media, which together with the lack of information about the country, which provides an interesting scenario to introduce Nation Branding campaigns.

### **3. Methodology**

To examine the concept of Nation Branding as a strategy and an instrument to improve a country's image towards the international society, I will carry out a qualitative research to obtain an insight towards proving my hypothesis.

In order to do this, I will firstly analyse what nation branding actually consists of and how it can be developed as part of a country's foreign policy. This conceptualisation will have to follow the theoretical basis established by the literature regarding public diplomacy. Once the concept has been reviewed by this paper, it will be applied into the real case study of Romania.

Once the concept is explained and analysed, and once it has been exemplified it is the time to assess the effectiveness of the topic. In order to carry out this assessment I will have to draw upon statistical figures that can prove the real impact of the strategy. Furthermore it will be interesting to compare the perceptions of the country by others with the reality of Romania. This will help to show if nation branding really achieves its aim of exerting an influence on others capable of changing the reality of the country on the outside perspective.

Therefore I will carry out an inductive approach to the topic by analysing particular campaigns and extracting general conclusions from the results. By means of carrying systematic observations of the reality, I aim to discover a theory through the generalisa-

tion of facts. The study will be carried out diachronically, since the implementation of the strategies, until the present day. This will show the gradual impact nation branding has on the image of a country, since the results would under no circumstance be immediate.

It is important also to refer to the impact each campaign has had on the international and national media to understand the context of each of them.

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1. Nation branding as part of Public Diplomacy**

Since the concept of nation branding began to be discussed, it has been within the dimension of public diplomacy (Lee, 2009). The concept of public diplomacy was initially coined in the United States in the mid 1960s, making reference to the way in which a country communicates with the citizens of different societies (Lee, 2011).

Later in the 2000s, the concept of public diplomacy was redefined to be especially focused on the people. Van Ham considers a key element of public diplomacy to “build personal and institutional relationships and to communicate with foreign audiences by focusing on values, setting the activity apart from traditional diplomacy” (Van Ham, 2001).

In other words, public diplomacy has to do with everyday activities of the citizens, making them part of the development of international relations. Wolf and Rosen argued that a country’s values, such as democracy, provide soft power for the country in diplomacy. It is a political notion which emphasises the communication between countries and international communities building trust relationships. In this way, nation branding aims to project an identity, integrating a national image to international audiences based on trust (Lee, 2011).

## 4. 2 The concept of Nation Branding

To understand the concept of nation branding we must refer to three interlinked actions that will help to describe it, Image, Brand and Nation Brand. In fact, we can describe this conceptualisation as a process, which begins with the analysis of the image projected, followed by the image that the actor is willing to project, and finalising with a nation brand as a strategy of public diplomacy.

In the field of international politics, the concept of Image was mainly developed by American economist, Kenneth Boulding, considering it as a “decisive element in the structuring of the dimensions of human behaviour and axiology” (Boulding, 1956). In this way, image is a very useful tool in order to promote a better perception by the surrounding world, economic relations, and even to alter the decision making process through the individual estimation of specific behaviours. The image an object projects (in our field of study, an international actor) represents the emotional experiences that other subjects have in relation to the object projecting such image. These experiences include, expectations, hopes, desires, knowledge or perceptions, and in some way “renders the subjective opinions and notions of the object” (Kroeber-Riel, 1996).

Of course, Image is equally important for a company, a product, a public individual or a nation. Having a positive image, generally derives in a good attitude or opinion towards the object (or actor). Image has always been important in society, but the importance of the matter has specially grown in the recent decades, this happens due to the development of societies and the growth in their heterogeneity. The complex nature of modern societies generates a large number of diverse opinions towards the same object, which causes conflict and tensions. Media has also been very responsible for the greater focus in Image and Branding, since the flow of information is much faster and accesible as it was in the past.

Once we have examined the concept of Image, it is time to understand Brand as a way of exerting influence on others. Brands serve as a means of differentiation to stimulate and influence attitudes and opinions of others (Abrudan and Mucundorfeanu, 2009). A



brand establishes the perception of the Image referring to the characteristics of the object. Therefore, nation branding consists of applying the branding process to a nation or country. When a country decides to create a strategy of nation branding, it will be necessary to define a mission, in order to nail down its objectives, and afterwards specify the vision or image willing to be projected.

It is obvious that designing a nation branding campaign is much more complex than a mere branding campaign for a product or a company. Nations comprise many more elements to be taken into account, specially in the process of the delimitation of the nation's identity. Nation branding was firstly coined by British policy advisor, Simon Anholt, in 1996, generating great interest in the following years in the academic field of international relations. Anholt noted that the reputation of countries actually works in a similar way to company and product branding, being equally critical the progress, prosperity and good management of it. The same author, in a more recent publication commented how the concept of nation brand had been distorted by the willing collusion of naive governments and ambitious consulting firms. For Anholt, nation branding is specially effective in an organisational perspective. The author does not deny that a country presenting itself in a manner that may result attractive for the international audience is effective as a tool of public diplomacy. However, Anholt finds a greater effectiveness of these efforts, in the result of carrying out through all the governments agencies a consistent, well-designed strategy executing its transactions with foreign actors. Offering a well-organised, modern, self-respecting impression of the state, with efficient structures, processes and mechanisms, is for Anholt the best nation branding strategy (Anholt, 2013).

In some way, this conception of nation branding can be found as a passive operation, consisting on a mere good practice. However, Anholt summarises the three main components of nation branding as the following: strategy, substance and symbolic actions. Strategy involves defining where the country stands at the beginning of the process, and where it is willing to get to. To do so, the country will have to design a strategy that will help it get to its objective, always by "reconciling the needs and desires of a wide range

of different national actors into a common direction” and “finding a strategic goal that is inspiring and feasible” (Anholt, 2013). Substance refers to the execution of organised economic, legal, political, cultural policies encompassed towards the obtention of the desired results. Finally, symbolic actions, would be those that aren’t part of the substance in a direct manner, but contribute to the direction of the main objective of the strategy. In many cases, the nation branding campaign will require new structures to coordinate, develop and maintain the strategy designed and its purpose.

### 4.3. Nation Branding in Geopolitics

As it has been previously mentioned above, geopolitics have been heavily influenced by the process of globalisation, introducing a new geopolitical calculation attending to different logics of social interaction and exchange (Cowen and Smith, 1990). As Cowen and Smith suggest, emerging geoeconomic forms are not necessarily replacing traditional geopolitics and diplomacy, but rather they are being transformed towards adapting themselves to the predominance of market logics.

Nowadays, there is a greater number of international actors which exert their influence over countries and populations worldwide. Multinational corporations, international, supranational and civil society organisations, play an important role on the international panorama, and power is no longer related only with defence or military capabilities. Globalisation has attributed greater relevance to economic and technological power. We can refer to Van Ham, who noted that we are moving ‘from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence’ (Van Ham, 2001). States have always worried about their image towards foreign countries and international organisations, since achieving such influence over others can help manipulate negotiation processes or diplomatic relations.

Nevertheless, we have to differentiate nation branding strategies, and other types of cultural diplomacy, propaganda, or image policies (Browning and Ferraz Oliveira, 2017). In order to offer a conceptualisation of nation branding as *sui generis*, we have to understand this term as a comprehensive strategy that involves a greater amount of sectors

in comparison to mere public diplomacy. Nation Branding does not involve generating understanding for policy decisions, it is actually about creating and selling identity (Anholt, 2007).

It is important to understand that other terminology, such as propaganda or image policy, have historically been negatively considered by the general public. An example of this can be found in Finland, where the propaganda campaign was called “information work” after the Second World War (Clerc, 2015). Something that seems clear is that nation branding has the clear objective of tailoring a national identity to be promoted outside its borders.

To understand the reasons behind the creation of a national identity, Louis Clerc and Nikolas Glover identified three basic logics. These logics are intimately related to nation branding, since they work together towards a common objective. Firstly, these strategies are aimed at acting as a cultural policy in order to inform foreigners and foreign nations about the country. This will secure the country’s recognition and international subjectivity (Browning and Ferraz Oliveira, 2017). Furthermore, it is not only about gaining recognition, but as Aronczyk suggests, this also serves as a way to convince other countries about their normality and hardworking. Both authors agree that these strategies actually transcend the will of attracting foreign capital, to serve as a form of legitimacy in the international sphere. This is specially present in small countries with a robust economy, such as Luxembourg, where the focus is not about attracting foreign investors which are already very numerous in the country, but rather to gain recognition in the international society.

Moreover, the second logic responds to serve as a tool of diplomacy in high politics, in a way that the state can use it to secure its desired position in the international system. The state promotes an image of its interest to pursue particular goals, a clear example offered by E. J. R. Cho is North Korea, which has placed itself as a military power against the superpower of the United States.

Finally, as suggested above, attracting foreign investment and promoting trade is always a central part of nation branding and identity building. Geoeconomics are intimately linked with the concept of nation branding, since economic competition nowadays happens mainly in globalised international markets. Nevertheless, we must not narrow the conception or understanding of nation branding as a strategy to promote commerce. It is important to acquire a broad understanding of the concept of nation branding. We can assume that each country will adapt its strategy according to its interests and needs, and in this sense some countries will opt for a more economically-focused perspective, whilst others may act differently. Varga finds an example of this in Germany, a country that shifted from a culturally-focused policy, as a way to inform about the new state formed in the heart of Europe, towards a commercial policy in the 90's after gaining the necessary political stability.

This example also brings up a very important question in reference to nation branding, since very often it is confused with nation building. British consultant, Wally Olins, noted the little difference between nation branding and the contemporary efforts of recently formed states to obtain proper and own symbols that would identify them intentionally. Therefore, this author considered nation branding and nation building as synonyms. We must understand that nation branding isn't only about appealing to foreigners, but it is also used as a way to build social cohesion. However, we seem to find a difference between both contexts in the audience towards they are mainly focused. Whilst both seem to support each other, nation branding may be absolutely independent of any kind of nation building. Nation branding programmes are in most cases orientated externally, having its main goal in encouraging others to identify themselves with the nation, not to encourage them to feel members of the nation (Ståhlberg and Bolin, 2015). Furthermore, since nation branding generally targets fostering economic development and attracting foreigners, this has no real effect on nation building, and even in some cases both concepts work contrarily. A good example of this can be found in Estonia, which organised the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002 as part of its nation branding strategy. However, this was in conflict with the nation building principles, which attempted to integrate a higher number of Russian speakers in the Estonian society as part of

the nation building strategy. The country is willing to follow multiculturalism to build distance with Russia, specially after the Cold War, however the presence of Russian speakers in its territory required a higher social cohesion as part of the nation building project. Therefore it is essential to distinguish both concepts. A simple way of understanding the real aim of each of them is that, whilst nation branding works on what “others perceive of us”, nation building works on what “we think builds up social cohesion”.

Furthermore, once we have a general outlook of what nation branding represents and how it benefits the states that make use of such programmes, we must focus on how it is useful for the international society as a whole. Beyond economic purposes, nation branding as we saw before wants to sell an image of normality to the rest of the world, and ideally attempts to project a constructive image of the country. Every nation prefers to be considered as friendly and collaborative. Therefore, we can assume that branding will promote benign and peaceful cosmopolitanism, in order for them to use this as a part of their competitive identity strategy. We even find how some countries use international cooperation for development as a strategy of nation branding. Conflict resolution and other peaceful activities with beneficial effects enhance the state’s global appealing, which is always helpful towards future negotiations.

Even though we have assumed that nation branding is essentially a contemporary concept that transcends traditional diplomacy, we must not consider them independent from each other. In fact, most nation branding strategies actually remain deeply rooted in traditional geopolitics. This works in this way because, it actually operates in a multipolar world where states seek to discipline their narratives in order to secure sectional advantages (Browning and Oliveira, 2017). In other words, international politics remain full of tensions and different audiences represent different poles interacting with each other. Nation branding attempts to reach every audience, and to convince them, attracting them to the personal ideology of the actor.

## **5. State of the issue**

As a case study to analyse the functioning of nation branding and its effects, I will use the case of Romania. In order to analyse this case it is necessary to gather around information regarding the country and its foreign affairs.

Romanian historian, Neagu Djuvara noted how the cohesion of the Romanian society had been broken after more than 40 years of communism (Sorin, 2015). The country was under the communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu between 1948 and 1989. Such a long period ended up marking the identity for the country, which began to be identified as an antidemocratic, totalitarian communist regime (Dolea, 2015). Djuvara considered that the best thing the country could do to change this image would be to write the correct history.

In December 1989, the Romanian Revolution took place, as part of the Revolutions that occurred in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe the same year. The Revolution ended up with the execution of the dictator, Nicola Ceausescu, and the end of the 42 years of Communist rule in the country. From this point, Romania emerged as a democratic European country with a new political regime and with the so-desired freedom that Romanians sought.

At the beginnings of 1990, the country generated great expectation, and so did other Central European countries, such as Germany, where the Berlin Wall had recently fallen. Shortly the Soviet Union would divide itself and the American supremacy would be undisputed (1991). All of these events were considered by many experts as a new stage of globalisation (Lupan, 2009), that would provide many new opportunities for the Romanian population. However the situation wasn't as optimistic as expected, many international journalists travelled to the country in order to inform about the enthusiasm of the Romanian society "but they faced a different reality than expected: thousands of mine workers violently marched the streets of Bucharest, shouting "death to the intellectuals" or "we don't think, we work", causing many deaths and casualties" (Dolea, 2015).

Simultaneously, the competition between old and new countries raised, and to compete countries had to explore their niches and gain competitive advantage over others. However, at this stage, the whole world was hearing about the social problems existing in a country where many disabled children were left behind and living conditions were very poor for a European country. Consequently, Romania began to be associated with a negative image and gained a bad reputation (Dolea, 2015).

The country failed to provide a new story that would be politically convenient, or to replace the existing attributes of national identity (Verdery, 1991). The Romanian society and leaders argued that the international media was contributing to the consolidation of a poor image of the country, by circulating damaging images and stories. The country had such a bad image, that it was exemplified in political debates as an example of bad reputation (Clinton, H, 2008, 2016).

At this point, with such context, the Romanian government considered necessary to design a strategy to build up a better image of the country before the international society. Furthermore, the growing competition between countries fostered a growing interest for them to care for their image and reputation. Many opted for nation branding as a way to change their image, regarding society, economy, politics or competitiveness. Globalisation had as a result, a bigger importance of image and reputation, and keeps growing at the present (Lovell, 1998). Romania wasn't an exception to this idea.

In relation to the country, after the violent protests of many coal miners in the Jiu Valley, the government undertook many economy reforms to promote a free market and a gradual privatisation of the country's industry. A soft economic growth was experienced until the decade of the 2000's, as a result of the obsolete industrial base of the country and a lack of its structural reform. This was followed by a transformation of the country's economy, which at the moment counts with a relative macroeconomic stability with high growth, falling inflation and low unemployment.

Some social reforms were quite surprising, since after the Revolution restrictions on contraception and abortion were eased, whilst orphanages were overpopulated with poor living conditions. In the field of politics, a new democratic constitution was adopted in 1991, and after the National Salvation Front overwhelming victory in May 1990, the country began a period of coalition governments until year 2000, when the Social Democratic Party took power. This party lost its power after the 2004 general elections, after several allegations of corruption, being succeeded by unstable coalitions accused of corruption too.

After the democratisation of the country, Romania has attempted to strengthen its relations with the West, in particular with the European Union, limiting its relations with the Russian Federation. The country joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 2004, and the European Union on 2007. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the recent governments have expressed its objective to strengthen ties and help other neighbour nations (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) in the process of integration with the West. Furthermore, Romania decided to adhere itself to the Schengen Area in 2007, being approved by the European Parliament in 2001, but rejected in the same year by the EU Council.

Specially remarkable are the country's relations with Moldova, specially due to their common background, history and language. In the 1990's a movement for unification of both countries appeared, once both countries became independent from the Soviet communist rule. However, this efforts lost importance when the Moldovan government in the mid 90's followed a different direction, willing to preserve the country as independent of Romania.

## **6. Empirical Analysis**

In order to analyse the building of a nation brand for Romania, the different campaigns launched by the government agencies will be examined. Following this, an analysis regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats will be carried out, in order to consider the results of such campaigns of nation branding. Finally, this paper will at-



tempt to analyse the effectiveness of nation branding to improve the image and reputation of Romania, and the adaptation of such projects to the concept of nation branding.

### 6.1. Eternal and fascinating Romania

As we observed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, in the mid 1990's the country began to worry about its international image and reputation. By 1994, it became one of the central concerns of the government and other authorities. Finally, in 1996 the Romanian Government supported by the Romanian Presidency launched this first nation branding campaign, titled "Eternal and fascinating Romania".

This campaign responded to the necessity to spread a good image abroad, specially towards the countries of the West. The Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time in which the campaign was launched, Mugur Isarescu, even asked Romanians to "at least pretend that they work if they wish to be accepted in the European Union (Isarescu, Antena 1, 2000). Even though we can appreciate certain efforts of the Romanian government and society to give a better image abroad, this declarations also suggest that Romanians can actually only rise to the level of the West by pretending (Heintz, 2006).

This campaign costed 5.97 million dollars (around 5.61 million euros) to the Romanian society, however it was supported by Bancorex, which acted as a sponsor of this campaign. Bancorex was Romania's largest bank during the 1990s, accounting for around a quarter part of the banking market share. This bank was bailed out in 1999 by the Romanian government and finally liquidated, to be afterwards merged with a more solvent banking corporation, the Romanian Commercial Bank.

This campaign basically consisted of the publication of an album containing more than 500 photographs of the country and its people (Annex 1). The album also contained information regarding Romania, its society, traditions and distinguishing elements. It was translated into different languages, including French (surprisingly the original version was in French and not in Romania), Arab, Japanese, Italian, Spanish and of course English. It is obvious, that the distribution of the album was specially oriented towards

the West and more economically developed countries, from which investment and tourism could be attracted.

Communication and marketing experts later considered that the messages sent by the album weren't very well conceived and that the workpiece did not attract the so-needed attention from the audience. This situation is absolutely unacceptable, since the main goal of this album was to attract the viewers attention to raise its interest in Romania, and it was clearly failing in doing so. Furthermore, another failure of the campaign was in relation with the distribution of the albums. It was initially planned to print and distribute around 97,000 copies of the album in 96 countries. However, by the deadline only 10,000 copies were printed, of which around 4,200 were distributed along Romania. Therefore, only around 5,800 copies were distributed abroad, which was clearly insufficient to reach the desired audience abroad. Also, the first 1,333 copies were considered as a special edition, and were distributed between Romanian personalities. The objective was clearly lost, since there was no reason to deliver these copies to Romanians, when the government is trying to attract foreigners and offer a better reputation of the country abroad. In fact, this campaign resulted somehow counterproductive, since the international media echoed this situation and also raised suspicions of corruption, since the company hired to carry out the printing and distribution of the albums belonged to a former advisor of Romania's President, Ion Iliescu (1989-1996, and 2000-2004).

The campaign did not count with any kind of electronic media platforms, and wasn't present in Internet, being limited to the possession of one of the hardcopies of the album. Beyond the publication of the albums, the campaign did not reach any other type of actions towards the restoration a better image of the country.

The Romanian authorities delivered no evaluation of the campaign, even though the corruption accusations built up a widespread scandal in the country. The editor and publisher of the album, Adrian Costea, whose business was based in France, was prosecuted by a French Court, which accused him of corruption, diversion of public funds and illegally financing the campaign for general elections of Romanian President, Ion Iliescu. The French prosecutors amounted the fraud in around 50 million francs (7.6 million eu-

ros) coming from its businesses with the Romanian government. Costea was accused of investing these funds for his private benefit and for other's officials of the government interest (Gallagher, 2005).

Ironically, tourism, a sector towards which this project was specially focused, decreased from 856,136 in 1994 to 832,775 in 1999 (INSSE, 2017). The international media informed more about the corruption scandal, than about the beauty of Romania and its efforts to improve its image. The images of the coal miners revolting were much more famous than the ones contained in the album extolling the landscapes of Romania and its customs.

## 6.2. Romania, Simply Surprising

Unlike the previous campaign examined, this one was launched by the Directorate General for Tourism Promotion, in a new intent to promote a new nation brand for Romania. This campaign was clearly oriented towards attracting tourism to the country, and it was kept secret to the media its auction and elaboration. This probably happened in order to avoid new scandals after the experiences of previous campaigns (Capital, 2004).

The decision to launch this project was adopted in 2001, however the campaign began in 2004 during the government of the Social Democrat Party, which invested around 20 million dollars (over 18 million euros and a half). It was finally carried out by British advertising, marketing and public relations agency, Ogilvy & Mather.

The campaign essentially consisted in commercial spots on international television channels, including some very relevant ones such as Euronews, Discovery Channel, British Broadcasting Corporation, Eurosport and Cable News Network. The advertising also included banners and adverts in international newspapers. Since Romania did not have a very relevant tourism market share, or a clear Image in this industry, the priority was set on designing this Image. Furthermore, the campaign attempted to make any stereotypes of the country, before the eyes of the international audience, to disappear.

The first error that this campaign probably committed was in relation with the dating, since although the media planning was correct, the spots took place during the holiday period. Moreover, the spots generally delivered a negative impression to the viewers, suggesting falsehood and a lack of solidarity amidst the nation. The message was also made quite unclear for the foreigners, since the huge volume of information regarding the touristic potential of Romania (Abrudan, Mucundorfeanu, 2017). As Abrudan and mucundorfeanu suggest, no association could be made between the intended brand and tourism, and therefore there was no clear Image tailored by the proposed Brand. Furthermore there was no real increase in the volume of tourists.

To top off the previous issues, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) criticised the campaign, since it considered it unsuccessful in communicating the essence of Romania. A group of experts from the United Nations Agency for Tourism argued that at that moment Romania lacked a strong, clear image in the marketplace and the destination brand that had been designed was sending mixed signals (Sepi, 2013). In addition to the lack of clarity of the campaign, it wasn't backed up with a website or electronic platform from where to obtain information.

Nos evaluation was again delivered from the authorities or the government, and the campaign was finally abandoned (Nicolescu, 2008). Fortunately for the country, the number of foreign tourists grew between 2000 and 2005, from around 870,000 to 1,430,000, being almost double the initial amount (INSSE, 2017). However, the media's reaction to the campaign was in general negative, which attributed the growth in tourism to other subjects instead to the Simply Surprising campaign and slogan. Once again, the international media echoed more the opinion of the World Trade Organisation, and the national media focused more on the suspicious contract between the national tourism agency and the public relations company hired, Ogilvy & Mather.

### 6.3. Fresh look at Romania

This initiative began in 2004 and had a new purpose, different to the previous and subsequent ones that will be analysed. Its main goal followed informing abroad about the

business opportunities that Romania offers to potential investors or companies to establish themselves in the country.

The campaign was carried out by the Ministry of European Integration of Romania and leaned on the media for the chore of informing about the opportunities the country offered. The two main media businesses in charge of the information process were the Economist and The Financial Times, but the campaign was also supported by other companies, such as Unilever or Coca Cola. These last two companies gave their testimony to the media about how they reached success in Romania and the opportunities the country offers for business making.

The cost of this campaign was satisfied by public and private institutions, that collaborated with a common objective, stimulating the economy of the country and entrepreneurship. Most of the information provided by the media showed economic data and depicted the economic position that Romania had in relation with the European Union and other neighbouring countries. This was carried out in this way to show the consolidated economic development of Romania during the mid-2000s.

An analysis carried out about the impact of the campaign on the country's Image and public opinion showed an overall satisfaction of the companies, which declared that they consider Romania's integration in the European Union as a great opportunity for the country's future economic development in the business area.

#### 6.4. Fabulospirit

This fourth campaign was born in 2006, as an initiative of Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Răzvan Ungureanu. The main difference of this new campaign of nation branding was its purpose. A press release from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that this initiative would “shape the image of Romania as a new European Union member, emphasising the spiritual dimension of the Romanian people” (MAE, 2008).

This initiative wasn't at all free of controversy, since diverse sources amounted the budget of the campaign between 3-5 million euros, however the company in charge of the elaboration only received a check for 110,000 euros. This amount covered the design of the slogan "Fabulospirit". Minister of Foreign Affairs spokesman, Corina Vintan, clarified that she decided to choose the company Gav/Scholz & Friends, since its project manager was the one in charge of branding the city of Sibiu, willing to create synergies between the national and local campaigns. The process of funds allocation didn't follow the stipulated procedure and wasn't finally a governmental decision as it should've been since the beginning.

The campaign, which initially consisted in a series of live concerts and advertising, ended up being a mere slogan, which attempted to describe the Romanian people. On one side it wanted to emphasise the spirited character of its people that live passionately and on the other side, the numerous places to visit and their traditions. However, broadcasters specialised in tourism were avoided, since the Ministry wanted to avoid designing a touristic image for Romania. The campaign's purpose escaped from attracting tourism, and marketed more cultural dimensions of the country that were less known to the general public. The campaign hoped for an improvement of Romania's image and sought to promote development in the country after a long term of dubious reputation. In some way, the slogan wanted to remark how every country has something special that makes it unique from the rest, which until that moment didn't happen for Romania.

Perhaps the real problem was that there were many different and opposed interests in the game. Whilst the Minister of Economy sought to attract investment, the Minister of Tourism supported the idea of welcoming a higher amount of tourists, both of which were different to the main interests of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This lack of organisation once again determined the fail of the nation branding campaign (Abrudan, Mucundorfeanu, 2009).

The international media began to be specially incisive with the case of Romania and the central government noted how important it was to create an organised and coordinated

strategy towards the branding of the country. On the other hand, the number of foreign tourists rose insignificantly.

### 6.5. Romania, Land of Choice

The last two strategies that will be analysed in this workpiece were initiative and lead by the Ministry of Tourism of Romania. In this case the Minister of Tourism was Elena Udrea, who was willing to “create a positive image of Romania as a tourist destination by defining and promoting a national touristic brand” (Stan, 2013).

The funds allocation for this campaign manifestly surpassed the previous ones, reaching a total of 75 million euros through the Regional Operation Programme of the European Union for Romania. This Programme aims at promoting smart sustainable and inclusive growth in all region in Romania, making them more attractive places to live and work (European Commission, 2019).

One of the main goals of the programme above is to develop cultural heritage and tourism as drivers for local economic development. With this campaign the Ministry seeked to increase tourism by at least a 10% for the year following to the introduction of the campaign.

Once again, the campaign was focused in the production of commercial spots that would be reproduced in the façade of a very visual building of Bucharest, Cocor Media Channel. Besides, the spots would also be projected in international media channels, such as Eurosports and CNN.

To support the campaign, the commercial spots counted with internationally recognised athletes and sportsmen such as Nadia Comaneci, Ilie Nastase and Gheorge Hagi. The campaign was also launched in Paris, where a show with traditional dances and music took place, and even a tennis exhibition match was organised between Ilie Nastase and Peter McNamara (Australian tennis player).

The slogan chosen was “one country, so many experiences”, and between other activities, the campaign extolled some customs of Romania such as the ritual of transhumance, multiculturalism, the mioritic space, traditional Romanian architecture or even Romanian horses. Therefore, we can observe how this campaign was until this point the most complete, escaping from a mere reproduction of images of Romania, and bringing to the public other interesting aspects of the Romanian culture.

Elena Udrea, delivered no evaluation of the performance of the strategy, however the amount of tourists in Romania even decreased the following year to the campaign, which clearly represents a fail to the accomplishment of the initial objective. Something to remark about this campaign is, the absence of critics to the campaign by national or international media, which until this strategy had always been quite negative.

#### 6.6. Explore the Carpathian Garden

This is the last nation branding strategy of Romania that will be examined in this work, and probably was the most controversial of them all. Once again, this strategy was the initiative of Elena Urea, former Minister of Tourism of Romania. And once again its objective followed doubling the number of tourists in Romania in the following three years to the introduction of the campaign, together with improving Romania’s image abroad.

The cost of hiring a foreign public relations agency, in this case THR, Innovative Tourism Advisors, based in Spain, was around 1 million euros. The agency commenced by carrying out a market study to investigate which countries were the best tourism markets to pursue for Romania. The results were the following: Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Russia, Austria, United States, France and Hungary. Apart of the previous results, the market study also identified the best touristic products Romania could offer to tourism. These were the results: cultural circuits, nature, rural areas, city breaks, adventure tourism and wellness tourism (Romania Insider, 2010).

As result of this research, the Spanish agency designed a logo, which was heavily criticised by the Romanian media. The main criticism was in relation to the price of the



logo, which could have been much lower in relation to the complexity of the design (Annex 2). The price for the brand logo was of 900,000, which in the eyes of the general public was completely unjustified.

Furthermore, the rest of the branding campaign consisted in the participation in several tourism fairs worldwide and some advertising on television channels and touristic catalogues of German operators. And once again, no final evaluation was delivered by the organising authorities or central government. However, in this case we can observe a real increase in the number of tourists in the country, which did not double, but turned from around 1,350,000 to 1,710,000 in three years time (INSSE, 2017).

### 6.7. Analysis of nation brand building by Romania

Once the most representative campaigns to build a nation brand for Romania have been examined, we can observe many similarities between them, in some cases with different results.

Something to praise from the initiatives we observe is the huge support and interest that public institutions and the government gives to the creation of a nation brand of Romania, in order to improve the Image of the country and fight against the widespread bad reputation that the country has abroad. And even if the allocation of funds was in some cases dubious and subjected to accusations of corruption by political authorities, there has been a huge investment of public funds towards the creation of a positive Image of the country.

Something that we cannot deny is that there has been a clear increase in tourists since the beginning of the process of building a nation brand for Romania. The amount of tourists has grown from around 850,000 in 1996, with the campaign “Eternal and fascinating Romania” to 5.2 million tourists only in the first half of 2018 (Business Review, 2018). This necessarily must be related with a better Image of the country, since tourism generally is attracted by well reputed destinations and promising activities. Furthermore, an increase in tourism has as a result a better knowledge of the country, which cu-

Currently receives more positive opinions in media, television and social networks from the visitors.

On the other hand, it has been a clear error in the designing of the strategies the lack of studies and research carried out by the agencies and public institutions taking the initiative. In order for a nation branding process to be successful, it necessarily requires a clear audience, clear objectives and a well designed procedure. It is essential, as Anholt suggests, that the country knows where it is actually situated and where it is willing to get to. And it is also essential to deliver an evaluation of the activities carried out and its results in order to switch to a different strategy or adapt it to a different context. No evaluation has ever been made after the completion of any of the above mentioned campaigns. It has always been left up to the media the criticism of the campaigns, which ended up being particularly harmful for the Image of the country.

In some cases, we also observe how the process of election of a private company or agency to carry out the strategy lacked transparency. This can be very clearly seen in the strategy “Eternal and fascinating Romania”, where the government faced severe accusations of corruption, which ended up in their loss of power. As Simon Anholt suggests, it projects a better Image and reputation when a country proves to be actually organised and effectively manages the structure of the public administration. The same author considers that nation branding, in fact, should be part of the national policy, and not a separate nation branding strategy. It seems necessary for Romania to build a stronger system of accountability and decision making to avoid accusations of corruption.

It would have been interesting to guarantee the success of the campaigns to engage all of the different actors of the Romanian society. Some campaigns included notable sportsmen and attempted to show some of the country’s defining element and traditions. However it would have been interesting to engage other actors of the society, intellectuals, businessmen, media, and the civil society as a whole. If the society works together towards a common goal, it is much easier to be effective and deliver an Image of social cohesion and consensus away from internal problems. In this way, we would also find a

connection between the nation branding campaigns and the Romanian citizens, who are the main representatives of the country, and in most cases the main source of conflict and bad reputation. The perception of the citizens of their own country is a faithful reflection of how a country works. Anholt noted in his works that countries where the people has a good perception of the country, can develop a very strong country brand. If the citizens do not really believe in their own country, they will not be able to persuade foreigners to do so (Gandul, 2007).

## **7. Conclusions**

In the recent decades, nation branding has become very attractive for countries willing to improve the Image abroad. Globalisation brings countries to a highly competitive market, where countries struggle to attract as much investment, tourism and trade as possible. The case of former communist nations is even more critical, since in some cases they seem to have fallen behind in the process of adaptation to a globalised, capital-managed world. Building Nation Brands for them represents a good opportunity, however driving this process is very hard and risky.

Those countries that are willing to opt for this strategies to gain a good reputation worldwide must abandon attaching in a simplistic way an image or stereotype to a country superficially. It is important to consider nation branding in a more complex manner, as concerted and perseverant actions carried out to obtain desired results (Pătraşcu, 2014).

Romania has carried out many efforts towards building a Nation Brand, with different results. We can also expect that many more effort will be carried out in the future by the different institutions of the country, to improve the country's image and reputation. It's difficult to deliver a general evaluation of the whole process, since it is necessary to offer a case to case particularisation of every activity.

We can observe how when the government discovered a real interest in building a Nation Brand for Romania, the orientation seemed quite abstract. This conclusion doesn't

require a particularised observation of the different campaigns of nation branding, since it is more related with the evolution of the process. Every campaign has followed different objectives, and when a similarity can be found in the goals of the campaigns, we see how the elements constituting the campaign are very different. Furthermore, it is difficult to observe a continuation of any of the campaigns examined and the following ones, instead of that we find completely different campaigns directed to different audiences, in different time lapses and with little risks taken.

Another clear conclusion that can be made is that the general negative Image of Romania is the result of a lack of information about the country abroad. The communist dictatorship closed the country to the outside, and once the democratisation took place, the media only echoed negative aspects about the country. When the government of the country has attempted to show the more positive aspects of Romania, it has always been frustrated by cases of corruption, criticisms by the media and a lack of coordination between the actors involved. Moreover the audience to which the strategies have been oriented, in some cases seem badly chosen, since many of the strategies described above have been directed to the Romanian society to a large extent.

For Romania, a priority must be to find a specific image to project outside. Today much more is known about Romania, however there is not a definite image of the country outside. Even though some steps have been taken towards adopting a unitary Nation Brand, the country is still lacking certain coordination and coherence.

Identifying an existing natural identity is very useful for country branding and in some cases identifying facts in a regional identity can be very relevant (Nicolescu et al, 2008). This efforts have been very present in the European Union, where it has been a priority to build a common sense of belonging and even of European citizenship in the past years.

The campaigns analysed in this work lack to show a connection or coherence in the attributes it is willing to transmit to the audience. It even gives the impression of attem-

pting to start from the beginning each time, without reaching an objective, or creating a strong and durable message that would improve the image of Romania.

The impact of the campaigns was minimally positive, since most of them ended up with a corruption scandal by the political elites of the country, delivering an even worse Image abroad. To organise campaigns willing to improve the country's image outside, it is important to offer transparency and avoid committing any irregular behaviours that can be subjected to criticism by the national and international media, or either prosecuted by the justice.

Perhaps a better way of carrying out the Nation Brand building process would be to begin by working inside the country, in relation to the political and economic structures, to afterwards pursue promoting a better Image outside. It seem evident that the biggest challenge of nation branding is actually communicating a single message to many different audiences worldwide with different contexts and cultures.

Clearly the way in which Romania has attempted to improve its Image via nation branding hasn't been helpful at all. It is important to understand that not every effort is successful. A country, especially in the case of Romania, has to take into account that the Image highly depends on how the country is actually working, and that an autonomous campaign will never result helpful.

After the analysis carried out, I observe how nation branding indeed can help to project a good Image of the country, but it will never be enough to use this strategy to do so. Nation branding must be combined with a good organisation and internal structure that can support the Image that the country is willing to project.

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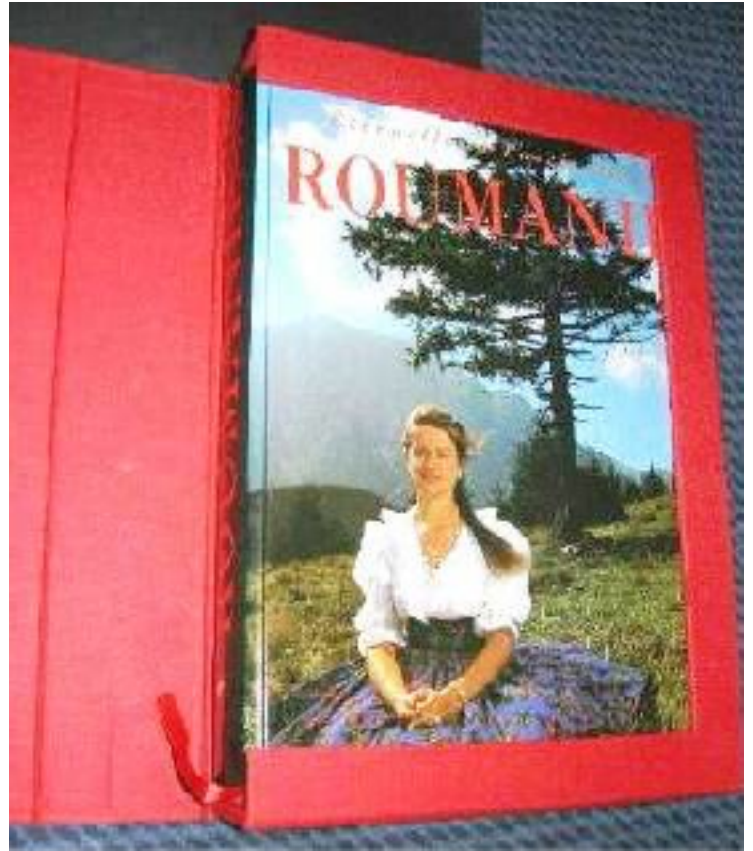


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## Annex 1



In these images we can observe the cover page of the album “Eternal and Fascinating Romania”, and the bookbinding that was delivered and distributed to the audience.

Annex 2



Logo of the nation branding strategy “Explore the Carpathian garden”, designed by the Spanish agency THR.