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Regional Branding as a Tool for Sustainable Development: The Transylvania Case

Ovidiu Andrei Cristian BUZOIANU[1], Oana Catalina DUMITRESCU[2], Florin DOBRE[3], Radu Florin CHIOTAN[4]

[1] *Assistant PhD, Bucharest University of Economic Studies*
[2] Lecturer Professor, *Bucharest University of Economic Studies*
[3] *Associate PhD, Bucharest University of Economic Studies*
[4] *PhD Student, Valahia University of Targoviste*
ovidiu.buzoianu@man.ase.ro
catalina.dumitrescu@amp.ase.ro
florin.dobre@cig.ase.ro
raduchio@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
Regional branding represents a key strategic instrument for strengthening territorial identity and enhancing regional competitiveness within the dynamics of globalization. Transylvania, characterized by its unique historical, cultural, and economic profile, offers an appropriate case for examining how regional branding can be applied in the context of Central and Eastern Europe.. This article aims to analyze the theoretical foundations of regional branding and the ways in which they can be adapted to the Transylvanian specifics, considering the ethnic diversity, cultural heritage, natural landscape and economic potential of the region. The results highlight the fact that a coherent regional brand for Transylvania must go beyond strictly touristic approaches and integrate economic, social and institutional dimensions, contributing to attracting investments, stimulating local entrepreneurship and consolidating social capital. The conclusions emphasize the need for participatory governance and an integrated regional branding strategy, capable of supporting the sustainable development and competitive positioning of Transylvania at the European level.

Keywords: regional branding, Transylvania, territorial identity, cultural heritage, economic development

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more and more scientific sources address the issue of modifying or influencing the image of a specific country, which is slowly but surely becoming a widely recognized international trend. The concept of a nation's image has evolved, often being referred to by terms such as place image or country brand, alongside the processes through which it is developed. As noted by Jenes (2013), the idea of Country Branding has acquired a broader significance, essentially reflecting the perception of a country's image.

In this study, we aim to present the key findings from significant research on the notion of "country image." Our goal is to contextualize this information to highlight the potential of regional branding, focusing on the theoretical foundations of Country Imaging. This approach allows us to quantify and demonstrate research outcomes in a way that is both measurable and analyzable.

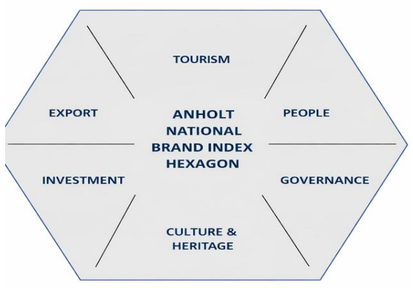
There are various ideas about how great a country's contribution is to increasing global well-being. According to Anholt (2011), the measure of this contribution can best be tracked by introducing the term "Good Country Index" which shows us to what extent the decisions and actions of different countries influence the evolution of the general well-being of humanity.

DISCUSSION

As smaller geographical areas compete with each other, the same trends can be observed at the national level. One of the most significant aspects of this competition is that this race becomes increasingly tough as time goes by, therefore it is necessary to maintain the good image of a country, the conscious way to build a brand, to position it correctly, to have a strategic planning of the overall process All countries possess a certain type of image that has been formed over the years from their history and culture, which is influenced by their economic potential and their tourist image.

There are some opinions that consider that certain countries cannot be branded, that the process is only viable for products. Country brands, unlike certain products, could have formed spontaneously and form a complete unit, which cannot be changed. In order for a country to avoid stereotyping, it needs a well-planned, unified image.

In addition to the necessity, there are other advantages that result from branding a country. According to Hankinson, G. (2004), there is a serious sustainable competitive advantage for investors, residents, institutions and visitors, after all for everyone. It can bring faster profitability for real estate and infrastructure, and from the perspective of the event, there is a chance for a coherent development of the place in terms of aspects related to branding planning, natural, social, economic and cultural objectives of the community.



CONCLUSIONS

The analysis demonstrates that regional branding represents a strategic governance instrument capable of integrating cultural heritage, economic potential, and institutional coordination into a coherent development framework. In the case of Transylvania, the region's distinctive historical legacy, multicultural character, and diversified resource base provide a strong foundation for constructing a competitive and authentic territorial brand. However, the effectiveness of such a branding strategy depends not merely on symbolic representation but on the alignment of policy objectives, stakeholder collaboration, and long-term strategic planning.

The study confirms that successful regional branding requires a multidimensional approach that combines narrative identity with measurable development outcomes. Regions characterized by complex identities benefit most from hybrid branding models that simultaneously valorize tradition and innovation. In this context, Transylvania's branding potential lies in its capacity to transform cultural capital into economic value while preserving authenticity and social cohesion.

At the policy level, the findings highlight the importance of institutional integration, participatory governance, and consistent international communication.

Fragmentation among local actors and the absence of unified strategic direction remain significant constraints that limit branding impact. Addressing these challenges through coordinated regional frameworks, data-driven monitoring, and sustained investment in visibility can significantly enhance brand performance.

RESULTS

The index attempts to assess the policies and global behaviors of nations through which they contribute to the common facts. Each country receives its scores based on a fragmented ranking (where 0 is the highest and 1 is the lowest possible score), compared to countries for which data is available. The ranking of these categories generates a common metric, which can provide an overall ranking, while also providing an overview that shows the contribution of each country.

The share of the service sector is on an increasing trend in Central Transylvania, in Banat and slightly above the median level in Southern Transylvania. The service sector is least represented in Northern Transylvania, in the Partium (Crișana) Region and in the Szeklerland.

The regional concentration is even more pronounced in the case of knowledge-intensive enterprises (information and communication services and professional, scientific and technical activities), with a high share in Central Transylvania (19%) and Banat (16%), but Southern Transylvania (15%) and the Szeklerland (14%) are not far behind in this respect.

Overall, the total share of companies operating in medical services and the representation of other non-cognitive services in Northern Transylvania and the Szeklerland is well below the national average (Kavaratzis& Ashworth, 2005). Service-oriented companies are more represented in those regions and counties where larger cities are found (e.g., Brașov, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu and Timișoara). The position of the Szeklerland in general statistics tends to be closer to the average.

If we look at the Romanian industry as a whole, we can see that the general contribution of this sector to the country's GDP is in a constant growth trend, in addition to the fact that, contrary to the overall national trends, the total number of companies operating in Transylvania had increased. In Southern Transylvania, there were 249,000 employees in this sector, which covers 29.1% of the total workforce. The index also studies what is the overall contribution of any region to the common good of humanity. We have to ask ourselves what is the purpose of a region: to serve its own population, businesses, leaders or companies, or even larger goals than that, maybe even the entire planet Earth. Through this we can measure why people prefer a certain region. Regions also contribute to general security, wealth and, through collaboration, have become increasingly competitive.

	Science and technology	Culture	International safety	World order and security	The planet and the climate	Wealth and equality	Health
Sweden	14	5	31	9	4	9	3
Denmark	7	4	49	7	21	2	4
Germany	22	12	38	1	8	19	1
Canada	28	14	18	11	11	21	8
Holland	9	2	25	3	47	25	5
Finland	10	11	34	5	2	52	15
France	25	7	46	12	19	17	20
Spain	46	19	19	14	17	22	24
Norway	25	15	58	6	1	50	2

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