

THE VALORIZATION OF THE BRAIN CIRCULATION PHENOMENON FOR PROMOTING ROMANIA'S IMAGE AND IDENTITY

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Abstract

This article was written in order to provide an overview regarding the opportunities of promoting Romania's image and identity through the brain circulation phenomenon; it deals with skilled migration from a developing country perspective, while emphasizing the influences that the Brain Circulation phenomenon can have in promoting Romania's image and identity abroad, within the nation branding process. Perceived as being one of the most important and sustainable assets that assures continuous development, the subject of nation branding became a widely approached one; thus, due to its complexity, the promotion of a nation within the nation branding process met various methods and techniques, while one of the most important elements has been avoided: the subject of the brain drain circulation, whose perspective regarding its image of the country of origin can suffer modifications while traveling abroad and who can influence other's opinion by becoming authentic representatives of their nation, country ambassadors across the borders. Considering this, the paper aims at facilitating readers' understanding regarding nation branding process, country image promotion and brain circulation phenomenon by identifying and explaining their connections and by highlighting their role in assuring long term prosperity.

Key words: nation branding; image; identity; Romania.

JEL Classification: M31, M37, O15, J24

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the emigration represents one of the social processes that profoundly influence the current Romanian society. More than that, the *globalization* phenomenon, perceived as a modernization process of the economic and communication aspects at a global level, draws a new global revolution – the highly qualified work force is allured (and kept) where there are conditions for development. Within this context, the brain exodus (the so-called “brain drain”) is considered an extremely important problem that numerous countries are facing, Romania being one of them. Mankind becomes pragmatic, free and is building an open society, with young people settling down where they can fulfil and develop their personality. But can be this process used by a nation in order to promote itself, to draw attention and to differentiate from others?

It is unanimously accepted that the manner in which a country is perceived can constitute the critical difference between success and failure of the efforts made in the business environment, commerce and tourism, it's diplomatic and foreign cultural affairs etc. In the context in which globalization tends to erode the general interethnic climate and the national identity through it's intense ethnicization and regionalization processes of social issues it is easy to understand that this process is one that negatively influences the effort made to maintain the identity, value and national status.

Particularizing this on Romania and taking into consideration the unstable internal political climate, the fight for power, the “prioritization” of personal interest –at the expense of public interest- and the reduced national pride that animates all of this, we realize how difficult and cumbersome the road to success in promoting, asserting and developing Romania's image and identity abroad becomes.

Promoting the image of a country in order to strengthen its process of destination branding, helps that nation to define its identity, to attract tourists and investments and to generate loyalty. In order to build a strong country/nation brand is necessary, first of all, that its inhabitants to be willing this. It is well known that a country can be promoted as a tourist destination, as appropriate destination for investments as a “centre” business etc. But which role plays its inhabitants in this process and how can they influence the way in which a country is perceived outside its borders? Is there a strategy that can be used for brain circulation phenomenon' capitalization, considering the fact that this phenomenon is perceived as being an extremely important problem that Romania is facing nowadays?

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in order to write the present article resumes to all appropriate methods and techniques used for collecting and processing empirical data and information, respectively to observing, sorting, correlating, categorizing, comparing and analysing data, so that it can be founded the addressed theoretical elements; in the centre of the qualitative thematic research addressed in the present article lie general elements belonging to Romania's image and identity promotion.

Thereby, perceived as some of the most representative works in the field -written by Romanian authors- "*Branding Romania: Cum (ne) promovăm imaginea de țară*" by Dolea A. and Țăruș A., along with "*De ce este România altfel?*" written by Lucian Boia and "*Fenomenul brain drain în România: analize, tendințe și influențe asupra imaginii de națiune*" written by D. Cotîrlea and L. Dragolea represent three of the main references of the present article.

Moreover, "*Proiectul de strategie pentru promovarea identității naționale în contextul intern și internațional contemporan*" written by M. Ciobanu-Băcanu provides an unique perspective concerning the promotion strategies used in the nation (re)branding process, while D. Hârtie, through her paper, "*Imagine versus brand de țară*" explains in clear terms the differences existent between the image of a country and a country brand, allowing –thus- to shape a comprehensive view regarding the complexity of branding process. Useful to its elaboration were also the interviews given by specialists in the field and published over time in online media. From all connoisseurs of the branding process, Wally Olins stands out through creativity, cheerfulness, efficiency and success.

Taking into account the wide range of elements that contribute to the promotion of the identity and image of a nation, for writing the present paper the authors reviewed the literature in the field, among which books situated at the confluence between marketing, sociology, management, communication and public relations.

III. GENERAL ISSUES REGARDING THE BRAIN DRAIN CIRCULATION PHENOMENON IN ROMANIA

The brain circulation phenomenon represents a temporary migration cycle, made especially by young professionals - moving the purposes of studies/internships/exchange or profit, with the intention of returning to their home country as soon as identifies an opportunity, whilst also bringing knowledge, new skills and technology transfer. Most experts believe that international migration of highly skilled persons from underdeveloped countries to countries with a flourishing economy threatens the overall development.

Taking into consideration the amplitude of students that, once with the acceptance of Romania into the European Union, choose to study at least one semester abroad, the local authorities and the players interested in the consolidation of the Romania - the brand should seize the opportunity and support, next to the specialized institutions, the departure abroad of youths.

Most studies suggest that the phenomenon of brain circulation itself has two distinctive negative effects. On one hand, although for the world as a whole, it's beneficial for the most intelligent people to exercise their abilities where they are receiving the highest reward, it's important to mention that this is not true for the countries that lose an important part of their educated middle class. Besides losing the potential production, the fiscal loss caused by migration is also added; thus, the tax payers from the developing countries have paid for the education of those who are leaving, and the emigration leaves behind fewer workers that will pay for the costs of taking care of the elderly" (The Economist, Outward Bound (Special Report Emigration).

The Romanian analysts preoccupied by the migration phenomenon of the educated individuals reached the following conclusions: "at the society's level, the migration of the young Romanian researchers is an important problem. Migration represents a significant loss for the country, because of the intellectual, scientific and economic potential they have, and because of losing the investment put into their education" (Florian, R. 2004). Financially, for each emigrant who graduated from university, Romania losses approximately 50.000 dollars/person. This sum represents the cost of 16 to 20 years of schooling, money that can't be recuperated by the Romanian society.

Paradoxically, at the Government's level, this subject doesn't seem important, and when it's found within the political oratory, it's treated superficially and – most likely – is included in the general debate of the work force deficit.

According to the latest studies, Romania has given to the world a tribute of no less than 24.000 students – but it's important to mention that this is only an estimate; unfortunately, the dimensions of the highly qualified work force migration of Romania is well known, which represents one of the main causes at the basis of identifying and implementing the adequate solutions for stopping this phenomenon.

The leaving of Romanians abroad mainly took place as an exodus of intelligence starting with 1990, considering that we are relating to highly qualified work force. If this phenomenon has manifested itself, in the beginning, amongst engineers, technicians and medics (which had as a destination the USA, Canada and France),

presently it widened its manifestation radius to computer programmers, economists, professors, but especially over young talents which can represent for Romania a competitive and well instructed workforce.

Those graduates of the Romanian universities that emigrate immediately after their graduation, in order to continue their studies or to work, represent approximately 10-12% of the total of people that legally emigrate. According to the “Demographic decline” study done by the Romanian Academy in 2007, those implicated in the legal migration are classified into three categories: highly qualified workforce (aged 25-40 years), having competencies in the top fields of science and technology, research and innovation; medium qualified workforce, with fields reaching from constructions (Germany and Israel), healthcare (Italy, USA, Canada, Switzerland), tourism and food industry (especially the western market); semi qualified or nonqualified workforce which work in agriculture, construction (Spain, Portugal) and sanitation. According to the study, the migration is selective, its subjects being, generally, young and representing a valuable workforce segment.

On the other side, the involvement of the youth in such programs has numerous advantages to their personal development, like: the opportunity to accumulate information regarding a different culture and, at the same time to introduce their own culture, tradition and customs to the people they come in contact with; furthermore, they have the opportunity to socialize, communicate and make new friends, to learn a foreign language or to perfect one already known. Furthermore, the youth has the satisfaction of independence, having the opportunity to earn confidence in themselves and, at the same time, to visit and know the European territory. In this context the city would benefit from confident youths, from their experience and from their results from the trip abroad- quantified in the context of city branding trough an increase in foreign tourists that visit Alba Iulia.

On the other hand, there is the risk that trough the support they receive, to contribute to the Brain Drain phenomenon in Romania.

With all of these in mind, we consider to be necessary, with the goal to promote Romania abroad, a long term strategy and an objective analysis on the influence that students departed abroad for a short and medium term have on the tourist flow in the city.

The quantification of the migration flow of qualified persons from the developing countries in the developed ones has proven over time to be sluggish and uneven. Authorities and statistical offices have only brief and limited database on the level of education and/or qualifications subjects migratory movement. It also identified the lack of data regarding the characteristics of immigrants and changing nature of migration.

IV. NATION BRANDING: STEPS IN PROMOTING ROMANIA’S IMAGE ABROAD

It is observed that, although it is considered that the responsibility of constructing a nation brand and promoting the national image and identity belongs to the government, it should be noted that “[...] the approach should be directed from the government level, but must be created in collaboration with the private sector, so only in part by the Government. Moreover, the country brand can be created against -and in opposition- with the Government”¹.

The country brand of Romania, although it comprises numerous subcomponents, it has emphasized so far the tourism side, while concentrating efforts towards attracting foreign investments, conducting public diplomacy processes, determining an increase in the rate of exports etc. left to be desired. It is mentioned in „*The BrandScience Guide of Destination Research*” that „[...] a brand is more than a name, a logo or a slogan and is not constructed strictly trough commercials and advertising. A brand represents, in essence, the sum of all the opinions that the consumers and clients make whine using the service or product in/from a certain country, opinions that, based on perceived emotional and functional benefits, lead to a certain position in the consumer’s mind”. As Wally Olins, branding specialist, says “brands mean identity” (Olins, 2006) - and thus, with the goal of becoming a brand of value, any country must “say” an appealing story. For this to be possible, it is necessary that the traditions and customs, language and history, values and culture of the respective country to be well known and rooted, only then communicating and promoting them onward will be possible. Every citizen represents an “ambassador” of his own country, ignorance representing an important impediment in creating the Romania brand.

For the creation of Romania as a brand a coordinated and well-structured process is needed, with long-term elaborated strategies, in which all implicated players to work together towards a common objective. It is important that the country differentiates itself and offers what it promises, from quality –in all its forms- to hospitality and memorable experiences, overall. Romania has to strive to become a unique personality among the countries which impose themselves on the tourism market –and not only-.

As an authentic brand, the country has to promote its rich values and culture, origins and religion, it’s own characteristics, originality and people. Furthermore, it is necessary to be taken into account that „[...] the place/nation/country brand contributes to the region’s development not only in tourism terms, but also in attracted investments, culture and heritage development, of citizen necessary facilities, thus helping to encourage the brain gain and brain regain phenomenon, occupancy rate increase etc.” (Hankinson, 2007).

Given the fact that Romania is a country considered to be "[...] fragmented, atomized and that fails to identify its own profile" (Boia, 2012), it becomes a priority to reach to a national consensus on what is meant to be promoted and what is really representative for the country.

In order to facilitate obtaining a response, it is necessary to identify:

- 1) what actually Romania militates for;
- 2) which are the vision and the purpose of the country in the context of a branding campaign through which the country's image and identity need to be promoted;
- 3) know what the values of the brand Romania (in the context in which Romania can be approached as a "brand") are;
- 4) know what makes Romania and Romania -the brand- differentiate from other nations.

Because is desired to promote Romania as a brand that differentiates, promises and generates loyalty, among the elements likely to be promoted in the nation (re)branding process can be included the art, the culture, the cuisine, the architecture, the history, the wonderful landscapes and other unique features of this country. For example, attributes such as hospitality, sociability, dedication, citizenship, cultural heritage, landscapes etc. may represent a nation and can be associated with it. In Romania's case, for promoting several characteristics similar to those mentioned above, is necessary for the existing negative image to be combated and to emphasize the positive aspects of both Romanians and their country, in general.

Considering the fact that the image of a nation is rooted in its own identity, the creation and the change of Romania's image can be conceived only through a revision of the past, through a return to its own origins, in order to try to express who we really are and which are in essence, the representative elements of Romanian culture and civilization. However, taking into account the beauties and the tangible cultural heritage of the country, "[...] except the traditional village, there are not too many elements belonging to the typical Romanian civilization. The most beautiful cities in the country, those from Transylvania, bears the imprint of others; the Romanian Athenaeum, a symbol of the capital, is designed by a French man (and not according to any 'Romanian' style). Dracula -the national tourism hero!- came out from the pen of an Irish. Romania is an extremely eclectic country, made up of pieces of all kinds. In this eclecticism lies, basically, its charm [...] Bucharest, "Little Paris", is rather -because of its architectural disorder- , an anti-Paris" (Boia, 2012). The historian expresses in his book, "*De ce este România altfel?*" his opinion regarding the country brand "[...] perhaps this is the authentic brand of Romania: the fact that it has none" (Boia, 2012).

The problem consists, probably, in the lack of a promotion strategy for a unitary brand to which all actors involved in nation branding process should converge. Besides that they can be perceived as brands, nations can be also seen as "products" - especially when they choose to be promoted as tourist destinations. Unfortunately, in the tourism sector of Romania, "[...] that could be among the most profitable in the country, the disorder ruled, together with the inevitable personal interests prior the public interest" (Boia, 2012).

V. THE ROMANIAN CITIZEN, SUBJECT OF THE BRAIN CIRCULATION PHENOMENON – A NATION

“AMBASSADOR” ABROAD

In the context in which a brand can be expressed through mental associations, each of Romania's citizens - beneficiary of the country's services- becomes an ambassador of the nation, an image bearer, a representative of national values and culture, the moment in which he travels abroad. In the context in which “we navigate through the more complex world armed with just a sum of clichés and prejudices as a symbolic compass [...] and stereotypes either negative or positive are the fundamental basis of our travel behaviour” (Dolea and Țăruș, 2009), the deserved importance must be given to internal branding, in order to increase the awareness of the citizens regarding their role in the construction of the Romania brand. Thus, as well as simple tourists but as subjects of the brain drain phenomenon of temporary (or even permanent) migration too, the Romanian citizens must regain their trust in the country's values, and to increase their social responsibility and manifest their desire to correctly communicate the Romanian values, culture and feelings, contributing to the quality of the improvement of the country branding. But the desired effort to be brought by them must be continuously supported by the authorized bodies, by the actors that can take part in the construction and consolidation of the Romania brand and by congruent image promotion strategies through well-coordinated campaigns that have as a final objective the adequate promotion of Romania as a brand that differentiates itself, promises an generates loyalty.

For a country to construct itself a powerful brand it is, foremost, necessary that the citizens of the respective country to want to do so. It so becomes impetuous that the following campaigns promoting the Romanian identity, values and culture to first address its citizens a positive image of the nation, this being of great assistance in creating the Romania brand abroad.

Generally speaking, behind the country branding are ambitious and visionary “players” that see the entire branding process as a strategically economic necessity. With Romania's accession to The European Union, EU

member states represent obvious targets for export, tourism and sources of investment. But because “once accepted in The European Union, Romania proved to be a rather dull member, without personality and initiatives” (Boia, 2012), Romania’s image and identity perception changing process, of creating a positive image and removal of stereotypes is hampered (and maybe even endangered) by the perception of the European public regarding Romanian national values.

The campaigns conducted with the purpose of constructing a country brand should address to both Romanian citizens and foreign tourists. Although some actors that are involved in this process consider that it is necessary that Romanian values, culture, natural and anthropogenic heritage, gastronomy, customs and traditions etc. should be promoted essentially to foreigners, to create or modify Romania’s image outside its borders, specialists disagree. In the context in which “the brand is identity” (Olins, 2006), and “for a country to be a valuable brand, it must have the best story to tell” (Shashi Tharoor, ex-official of ONU, <http://www.frontnews.ro/social-si-economic/eveniment/fost-oficial-onu-catre-romania-branding-ul-de-tara-se-face-uneori-cu-opozitia-guvernului-10234>) it is easy to understand that the inhabitants of a country must know their customs and traditions, language and history, values and culture so that they can communicate them further on. Every citizen actually is an ambassador of its own country, ignorance being an important impediment in the promotion of the real Romanian values.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that “[...] the way in which the residents are behaving in the direct interaction with foreigners leads to the formation of an authentic view” (Dolea and Țăruș, 2009). These being said, it is easy to see that obtaining the support of the Romanian people in the construction of a nation (and/or country) brand and correctly informing them represents the key to success in the branding process.

VI. CONCLUSIOS

It is certain that Romania requires the redefinition and repositioning of its image abroad. In the context in which the country benefited from “[...] an apparently impressive industry, sustained with large investments, but deficient regarding productivity, quality and adaptation to market requirements” (Boia, 2012), the creation of a space of confidence in Romania’s favor is needed so that the nation can profit from the competitive potential that it has available and from the tangible benefits that result from the exploitation of it.

With the accession of Romania to the European Union, the E.U. member states are obvious targets for export, tourism and investments. But because “once accepted in the European Union, Romania has proven its self quite a blunt member, without personality and initiative” (Boia, 2012), the process of changing the manner in which Romania’s identity and image are perceived, by creating a positive image and by removing stereotypes is hampered (and may be even endangered) by the perception of the European community regarding the Romanian national values.

It is considered, therefore, that “the promotion of cultural and spiritual national values, remodeling and intensifying the efforts on public diplomacy to improve Romania’s image, the degree of understanding and support of external policies by the Romanian people and the level of international public opinion” (Pike and Scott, 2009) are imperative. But, to facilitate the smooth conduct of these processes “[...] we need more than anything a critical and least indulgent approach: to separate ourselves from mediocrity and imposture of value” (Boia, 2012), because only in this manner the image of Romania will be improved inside and outside its boundaries.

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