ABSTRACT. After the communist period Romania made few steps to present itself as a tourist destination at international level after a long time. Romania has an important tourist potential due to its geographical position and its complex natural environment. This richness of potential tourist products generated a wrong idea that at international level Romania is a desired and popular tourist destination. The WTTC recommendations in 2006 report were to urge the branding process and within it to promote Romania’s diverse and tourist unique regions.

The goal of the paper is to present the international context from country brand point of view and to analyse Romania’s actions in this complex process of branding. Romania offers a complete package (mountain, cultural destination, Danube Delta, Black Sea) and tourist destinations are situated near one to each other. Also, Romania has several national and international values which should be exploited properly.

The study highlights competitive advantages of the country as a tourist destination, strengths of Romanian’s tourist products and analyses actions made for the branding process of our country as a tourist destination.

Branding process for Romania is making only the first, timid, step.

Keywords: country brand, branding process, tourist destination, branding, Romania

International context

Brands represent a promise of value and are considered an important tool for differentiation of a product. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as „a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. The legal term for brand is trademark. A brand may identify one item, a family of items, or all items of that seller. If used for the firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name”.

Destinations – even the destination is a country-, like products or people, can be branded. Branding a country or a company is like using same principles but different methods. Destination branding is a process used to develop a unique identity and personality, different from all competitive destinations. The complexity of destination branding is very well underlined by Morgan, Pritchard and Pride where the authors highlight that a destination is not a single product, but a composite one
which includes: accommodation and eating/dining establishments, tourist attractions, arts establishments and cultural venues. The whole atmosphere of a place, the hotels in which tourists stay, the friendliness of the local people and the overall impression are essential for the creation of a successful destination brand (Morgan et al. 2002).

County brand is a recent subject on Romanian market. For our investigations we used exploratory research, obtaining secondary data through statistical and published studies, extensive web sites analysis and primary data through a focus group which has the topic on identification of main Romanian characteristics for defining identity.

Favourable county image has direct impact on trade, investments and tourism. But why to create a county brand? The main reasons are simple. Strong country brands will (CBI 2008): communicate with power and economy; attract talent and investment; promote sources of economic value; enable and/or endorse change; brand exports profitably; redress stereotypes and clichés; express a unique core idea; build global competitive advantage; serve as a source of differentiation; link distinct country offerings.

Tourist country brand is only a part of the country brand but an important one. Country Brands Index examines how countries are branded and ranked according to key criteria, and identifies emerging global trends in the world’s fastest growing economic sector – travel and tourism. Since 2004 the global contribution of Travel & Tourism economy in GDP increased in average with 3.6%, greater than of the global economy overall. In 2008, T&T economy GDP growth slowed to just 1.0%, its weakest performance since the recessionary period. For 2009 the prediction is 3.3% and to expand by only 0.3% in 2010 (WTTC 2009).

For 2008 Top Country Brand Ranking, CBI considered the following assets which lead and drive country brand performance:

1) Wants oriented
   • attractions: diversity and quality of unique places, range of things to see and do;
   • authenticity: unique character along with the rich texture of local life; rituals, programming, events;
   • culture: arts, crafts, intellectual pursuits, creative environment;
   • ethos: customs, beliefs, mores and history that create a distinctive mystique;

2) Needs oriented
   • geography: natural resources, topography, landforms;
   • infrastructure: technology, communications, transportation, health care;
   • governance: degree of effectiveness in the way a country is ruled, as evidenced by political freedom, safety, security;
   • economy: ability to produce and distribute wealth; standard of living.

Using these criteria the ranking made by CBI is presented in the figure 1:
The concept of life cycle is used also for destinations. Because no country brand ever stands completely still CBI divided the countries in 5 categories (CBI 2008, pag. 25): **emerging** – country clarifies its unique essence and begins to communicate that essence to attract attention and resonate with audiences (Colombia, Ethiopia, Libya, Uzbekistan) –, **in vogue** - which becomes the new “it” destination, generating word-of-mouth advocacy and establishing itself as the new place to be; this status lasts a few years at most; early adopters are notoriously fickle and will abandon a destination quickly once word has gotten out to the wider marketplace (Cambodia, Morocco, China, Romania) –, **rising** – experiencing growth in awareness, a solidifying brand image, plus increasing traveller preference and loyalty (Canada, Vietnam, Scotland, UAE) –, **maintaining** – brand maturity; some countries stay in this phase for extended periods of time (UK, Japan, New Zealand, Italy) and **declining** – a strong brand can help a country rebound from status; reconnect with audiences by staying true to the brand’s core essence, or, if necessary, by recasting itself in a new light (US, Egypt, France, Kenya).

The Country Brands Index 2008 rankings had analysed specific dimensions of the brand: Best Country Brand Ideal for Business, Extend a Business Trip, Art & Culture, Authenticity, Beach, Families, History, Resort & Lodging Options, Natural Beauty, Nightlife, Fine Dining, Outdoor Activities & Sports, Rest & Relaxation, Safety, Shopping, Value for Money, Would Most Like to Live In, Ease of Travel, Standard of Living, Political Freedom, Advanced Technology, Quality Products, Most Impressive Last Year. From Central and Eastern countries CBI ranked at Value for Money (offering the most in return for the price you pay) Czech Republic on 4th place, Poland on 5th place and Hungary on 10th and at Rising stars (on their way to becoming major destinations) - Croatia on 3rd place.

**Fig. 1.**

Source: CBI 2008, pag. 20
Where we are?

Romania has a harmonious and diverse landscape and, from the tourist point of view, could be considered one of the beautiful and resourceful places in Europe. Romania, also, has a rich traditions and culture, both are inspiring variety and ever-happening action. It is agreed that Romania has a huge potential in tourism field due to its geographical position, its complex natural environment, but also due to its seven World Heritage Sites registered by UNESCO: the Danube Delta, the citadel churches of Transylvania, Horezu Monastery, the painted churches from Bucovina – Moldavia, the historic citadel of Sighisoara, the wooden churches of Maramures and the Dacian fortresses near Orastie – Hunedoara. To all these we could add another long list of beautiful sites – numerous spa resorts among them – and monuments, list which could become even longer when we add the local and regional traditions.

Countries often promote their history, their culture and their beautiful scenery in their marketing campaigns; but many destinations have these attributes. It is critical to build a brand on something which uniquely (and immediately) connects a destination to the consumer or has the potential to do so in the future (Morgan et al. 2002)

Good destination branding is therefore original and different, but these characteristics need to be sustainable, believable and relevant.

In these conditions, the main things which should be considered are:
- Romanian tourist destinations are situated near to each other; this could provide a good base for combined tours in the space of several days;
- the country could offer a complete tourist package (mountain, spa & wellness, cultural destination, the Danube Delta, the Black Sea);
- traditions and customs are preserved in rural areas and could be included in tourist packages; those can be completed with numerous folklore and tradition festivals and (sometimes, if needed) spiced with ‘Dracula’s legend’
- the mountain regions are unspoiled and can represent the potential for niche products like hunting, fishing, bird watching, hiking, mountain biking, and other forms of adventure tourism; some of the mountain regions are included in national parks and protected areas which can be attractive for those interested in peculiar species of plants and animals;
- culture and history are rich, connected with Europe but with local features; they could form the core of the Romanian tourist product.

The most recent work regarding Romanian Tourism Development is the Master Plan for Developing National Tourism 2007-2026 in which also mentions that Transylvania is an existing brand and its position is only enhanced by the fact that Sibiu was European Capital of Culture in 2007.

Romania also has several cultural values and icons recognized at international level like: Constantin Brancusi (his works were included in Romanian presentation spots and can become a cultural symbol for Romania since they combine traditional
and modern elements), George Enescu (his music can be used in presentation spots – similar: combining traditions with modernism; every year Enescu Music Festival takes place), Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionesco. More recent Romania becomes known in the arts world through opera singers like Mariana Nicolescu and Angela Gheorghiu, but also through ballet dancers. All their names can be used to enhance the core cultural products.

Sport figures and football/handball teams can also be used to attract those tourists interested by this kind of events.

About the Romanian culture identity many sociologists, historians and specialists in branding presented different ideas, many of them in contradiction. It is hard to define the main features of the Romanian society in order to identify the national identity. In general the Romanian people see themselves first of all as patriots, hardworking, hospitable and humane. This idea does not mean an idealization of the Romanian people about themselves, because in relation with others Romanians appreciate more what they think about them, so their own image depends on what the other believe about them. But Romanians are very lucid. The special feature is this capability to make a realistic evaluation of their situations and to see all the time the positive part in there. This facilitates a free spirit open to creativity.

In 1925 the Comte of Saint-Aulaire (French ambassador in Romania) said that for French people Romania represents a place in their heart because two elements – the intelligence and the sensibility – made the connection between the spirits of French and Romanian. (Ghyka 2007). Unfortunately, this perception of Romania is long lost.

During the 1980s and the 1990s Romania has lost several important elements which had represented it as a tourist destination in the 1970s. Among them, the most important were affordable prices in decent accommodation within spa and littoral resorts, and geriatric treatments with Ana Aslan products. The first were lost due to neglect and degradation of facilities. The second, a brand in itself, was almost forgotten due to endless legal battles among Romanian companies about the rights to use the name and the royalties generated by Ana Aslan products. The development of cultural tourist products should complete the brand identity building process, as WTTC Report (2006) also recommended.

But what Romania can promote in order to create a base for its brand identity?

The first promotional campaign which has been identified after 1989 was the one connected with the total eclipse of the sun on August 11th 1999. The eclipse was announced to be fully visible from Romania with several optimal points in the southern part of the country. The title given to this campaign was The 1999 eclipse. The budget for this campaign was 1.5 million USD. The money came from the Special Fund for Promotion and Development. This special fund was created through the contribution of 3% from the total income of every tourist agency within Romania (Enea 1999).
One of these campaign outcomes was the fact that new and fresh images were used to present a brighter and better Romania. Until that moment the small numbers of printed materials promoting Romania were using old pictures from the 1970s.

These new images were also used in TV spots broadcast on the Discovery, Eurosport and Euronews channels and for printed materials presented at international tourist fairs and expositions in Berlin, Madrid, Milan and Paris. The total cost for the TV broadcasts was 140,000 USD and the costs for participating in fairs and exposition, including the printed materials, were 500,000 USD (Enea 1999).

Romanian National Bank issued a special banknote of 2,000 ROL to celebrate the eclipse. Meanwhile, the printed materials promoting tourism were difficult to find inside the country.

The results of the campaign were disappointing. Romanian authorities made a rough estimation that 500,000 people would be interested to come to Romania to see the total solar eclipse. In July the total number of foreign tourists who expressed an interest to come in Romania for the event was around 3,000 (Enea 1999). By the end of 1999 it was clear that the eclipse did not bring the expected number of foreign tourists. The total number of foreign tourists was lower in 1999, 794,000 compared with 1998, 807,000 foreign tourists.

Despite failure, this campaign was the first launched after 1989 and it paved the way to promote Romania as tourist destination through a coherent marketing campaign.

A strap line which appeared sometime during 1999 was The eternal and fascinating Romania. This slogan was used as the title for a photo album promoting Romania, mainly abroad. The author of this album was presented by the Romanian media as a controversial figure with many political connections.

During 2000-2001 the strap line come as a tourist, leave as a friend was launched. It seemed to have no connection with any promotion campaign and the idea was not very original. This slogan was present on the old official website promoting Romanian tourism, www.turism.ro. The strap line still can be found on the Romanian website dedicated to promoting tourism in the USA, www.romaniaturism.com.

The most recent promotional campaign for Romania as a tourist destination was presented during the summer of 2004. The strap line for this campaign was Romania - Simply surprising. The project for the campaign initiated in 2003. Other sources indicate that the idea for this campaign was formulated in 2001 (The Diplomat Bucharest 2006).

A source announced that the budget for this promotional campaign was approximately 1.7 million USD (Obae & Barbu 2004). Another stated that the total costs of the campaign were around 250 billion ROL - or around 7.6 million USD at 2004 rate (Niculescu 2005). The first source indicated only the budget for creating the campaign’s spot. The second source spoke about

The total promotional costs, including the advertisement spot and its broadcasting costs, the printed materials and the participation in fairs and exhibitions...
were around 7.6 million USD at 2004 rate (Niculescu 2005). The campaign targeted the foreign tourists.

The spot was developed by the advertising company Ogilvy & Mother Romania. The main goals of the campaign Romania—simply surprising were:

1) to present Romania as a tourist destination;
2) to change the way Romania is perceived and to generate a different attitude toward Romania, mainly on the part of tourists from EU countries and the USA.

The message of the campaign was: Romania has changed and improved as a tourist destination.

The spot had the duration of 60 seconds and was broadcast between June and August 2004 on Euronews, Eurosport, Discovery Channel, CNN, and BBC. It had the frequency of one broadcast per day per TV channel.

The target of this campaign was: informed tourists of 20-55 year-old, who have an average income, with an interest in new experiences, culture and history.

The printed materials were still present in 2005 in several places in Europe, e.g. London underground stations. (The Diplomat Bucharest 2006).

The comments and criticism of the slogan Romania—simply surprising were many. From the advertising professionals’ point of view, ‘simply surprising’ is ambiguous and can have both positive and negative connotations (Cosma 2004).

The NAT representative considered it appropriate because people expected something wrong or bad when they came to Romania, and it was important to highlight the changes (Obae & Barbu 2004).

Maybe the dual sense of the word ‘simply’ could have been avoided if the translation in English the Romanian language: Romania—mereu surprinzatoare, would have been more accurate. Then it would have become Romania—always surprising.

In February 2007, the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs announced its intention to launch an image campaign for Romania. The advertising company GAV-Scholz & Friends was selected to create a framework named FABULOSPIRIT and cost 110000USD.

Leaving aside the controversies which arose after the concept was launched, it must be pointed out that it has the quality of being unique. It is also in tune with the existing strap line Romania, simply surprising and the idea of spirituality is connected with Sibiu’s position for 2007. FABULOSPIRIT (combines the colloquial fabulous with spirit, a word with a deeper meaning) is a complex concept of interestingly though intriguing positive and negative elements. Due to its generous opening, FABULOSPIRIT can incorporate also the controversial Dracula name and myth and make it more acceptable as tourist product.

However, it proved that Romania’s branding process was not abandoned; but until than no more information were available.

For 2009 Romanian Tourism Ministry has important projects:
launching in May the campaign “The Romania, Land of Choice” to promote cultural tourism, eco-tourism, agrotourism, the seaside, Bucharest and Sibiu for European countries and United States;
- launching in May the campaign “Tourist in Romania” for attracting Romanians to spend their holidays in the country;
- launching at the end of the year the project for new brand of Romania with the support of international specialized companies with a budget of 75 millions EUR.

Where we should be?

After 2001 the purpose of the authorities has to put Romania on tourist map. We propose a model for branding a country with the following steps:

a) identify the identity of the country
b) actual context: what we offer – determine de tourist products – and to whom? – find the targets and their needs; compare with what others offer and to whom; determine competitive advantages
c) cooperation between authorities, business, the arts, education and media
d) analyse country perception form intern (Romanians) and extern (foreigners) perspective
e) formulate branding strategy
f) implementation
g) evaluation

Several market studies were made during the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s by the Romanian authorities, but none of them do not establish a profile for the foreign tourists visiting Romania (Pop et al. 2007).

As expected, Europe is the best represented in the statistics of arrivals (95.48%). The official representatives for tourism conducted market studies in the following countries: United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Russia. Also the official tourism representatives from Czech Republic, Italy, Russia, Sweden, China, Germany, Slovenia, UK and Ireland, USA, Austria, Slovakia, Poland, and Turkey were interrogated regarding their interest toward Romania. Other countries outside Europe that were considered for market studies were: USA, China and Turkey.

In 2006 USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and INCDT (National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism) made studies that suggest some aspects of the foreigner tourist profile for Romania:

- 56% from the foreigners were between 20 and 39 years old;
- they prefer municipalities (49%);
- 60% from the respondents were at the first time in Romania;
- on a scale between 1 (excellent) and 5 (very poor) Romania received a medium to good score for all the purposes of the visit, 1.9 for the experience, 60% considered that their expectations were achieved and 35% that their expectations were exceeded.
The interest expressed by either official representatives of tourism or by tourists highlighted the following (Pop et al. 2007):
- cultural tourism, including medieval towns and Transylvania, and cultural tours were on the top of foreign tourist preferences;
- the Danube Delta and cruises on Danube were indicated next;
- combined tours – urban tourism with spa & wellness followed;
- theme tours were mentioned especially by American and British tourists, mainly concerning the Dracula theme;
- mountain tourism, active tourism, and the Romanian littoral had average frequencies;
- ski tourism was the least preferred.

As WTTC in its 2006 report recommended and the National Authority for Tourism (NAT) research results indicated, Romanian authorities responsible for tourism should concentrate the offer on cultural tourism and on spa & wellness tourism if they want to be in tune with tourists’ requests.

In the Master Plan were identified the following area for tourist potential development:
- City Break in Bucharest for culture, entertainment and MICE
- Transylvania tour for culture, nature, ecotourism, health, wellness, ski, adventure
- Black Sea coast for beaches, entertainment, culture, health and wellness, cruises
- Bucovina tour for culture, ecotourism, nature, health, wellness, ski, adventure
- Maramures tour for culture, nature, ecotourism, ski, adventure
- Danube Delta for nature, ecotourism, fluvial cruises, entertainment

Why we aren’t there?

Several mistakes are made in country branding:
- decentralized way of approaching branding process which minimize the brand power;
- short term approaching of the branding process rather then as a strategy

Even if Jack Trout said that “Romania has no image, but this is an empty plate that can be filled” and maybe this is an American opinion we consider that we should start the branding process from the identity of the country and from the Romanians and foreigners perception about the country. The fact that an important part of Romanians don’t have a favourable image about Romania and few Europeans – especially Italians and Spanish – have the same opinions must be taken into account in branding strategy implementation.

The Master Plan for Developing National Tourism 2007-2026 suggest that the perception of the Romania as a tourist destination is unclear as a result of:
- deficiency in destination marketing,
- no governmental support for tourism,
- unprofessional actions in business tourism sector,
- low standards of the offered services,
- improper tourist infrastructure, facilities and time spending opportunities.

Romania is not visible on well known tourism web sites (www.europe-travelers.eu, Lonely Planet etc.) were the competition is present. Romanian websites have the disadvantage of focusing on underdeveloped products like cuisine and wine tourism. Also new products, like active tourism, need a lot of improvement since they started to be developed only 2 to 3 years ago (Pop et al. 2007). All these hesitations are reflected in the evolution of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index for 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Table 1.

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