Branding a nation – Romania and Simon Anholt

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to the branding literature on the Romanian image and identity. The aim of this paper is to modestly contribute to the challenging process already begun there: branding Romania. It deals with concretely defining the ways in which the Romanian image can be brought as close as possible to the Romanian reality. This is an attempt to de-falsify an existing image for the mutual benefit of both Romanian and the global community. It also deals with how a "road map" is to be designed in order to reach the minimal level of fairness in Romanian labeling.

Keywords: *Romanian image, national identity, global community, brand.*

The early 2000s and the globalized business environment imposed the necessity of looking at the image of a country in a very pragmatic way: *What can we sell?* The process of selling the best image got the name of *branding nation* and the result of this process – *nation brand*. Therefore, according to this perspective there are images of nations that are selling more than others.

In the following years, this became an independent domain, separating itself from marketing and becoming part of what we now call *Public Diplomacy*. In this new perspective, the concept of the *branding nation* expanded to *nation brand* and *nation branding*. The interest for this domain became recognized and imposed in the Anglo-Saxon environment, and then became rapidly a global concept guided by Simon Anholt.[1] *Branding a Nation* is a complex process to gain a good

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[1] The inventor and the promoter of the concept of *"Nation Branding"* is Simon Anholt. It was in 1998**,** when Simon Anholt used firstly the phrase in an article in the *Journal of Brand Management* entitled "Nation Brands of the 21st Century" Vol. 5 No 6, July. In 2002, a Special Issue on Nation Branding in the same journal, *Journal of Brand Management* (Vol 9 No.s 4-5, April 2002), specified the concept. The year 2004 – gave a new horizon in branding studies, by launching a new quarterly journal, *"Place Branding"* originally published by Henry Stewart and now by Palgrave

reputation for a country. It is Anholt that created, imposed and defined the strategy for branding a nation.

The present paper tries to briefly explore the literature on branding and on the Romanian image.

The reviewed literature used for Branding Romania has been divided into four sections.

I.   Section I is devoted to finding a way to define a general theoretical concept of Branding a Nation.

II.   Section II explores the meaning of Romania as an abstract concept, beyond the geographic and political reality. In addition, it also refers to nurturing the attachments and the feelings of Romanians to their symbolic and perennial ideal country.

III.   Section III is dedicated to discovering valuable published contributions in transforming the general theoretical concept of Branding Romania to an empirical one useful for measuring the obvious dimensions of what Romanian Brand is, and should be, in order to ensure a better status for Romanians in a cohesive Europe in a globalized world.

IV.   Section IV is concerned with the presentation of the Simon Anholt model and how to use this model for understanding the reality of a nation from different perspectives, but based on objective references for comparing nations' brands.

In conclusion, Section V is dedicated to legitimize an attempt to transfer Anholt's Hexagon for measuring the results of branding to the promoters of Romanian branding. This hexagon comprises 6 perspectives: export, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people and tourism.

1. General concept of Branding a Nation

Section I of this chapter is devoted to finding a way to define a general theoretical concept of Branding a Nation.

The major texts used were those of Simon Anholt. There are books, articles, interviews and comments on Anholt's works, namely: Anholt, Simon – "The role of the culture in national branding" in the volume *** *Heritage and Identity*

Macmillan under Andolt's direction as editor. From 2006, Anholt launched and currently edits the *"Anholt Nation Brands Index"* and *"Anholt City Brands Index"*, two surveys based on data provided by Global Market Insite, Inc, of Seattle, WA, which provide a ranking by brand value of a number of cities and countries, based on his Nation Branding Hexagon. He is the British Government's advisor on Public Diplomacy and advises a number of other governments on their branding strategies.

(2002), edited by Flamark, M., Donhead Publishing, Shaftesfury, UK,Anholt, Simon – *Brand New Justice: the upside of global branding*, Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford, 2003, Anholt, Simon with Jeremy Hildreth – *Brand America: The Mother of All Brands*, London: Cyan Books, 2004, Anholt, Simon with Jeremy Hildreth – *Brand America: The Mother of All Brands*, London: Cyan Books, 2004, Anholt, Simon – *Special Report on Denmark's National Image*, Q1, 2006, *Special Issue on Nation Branding* with Anholt, Simon (Guest editor) of "*Journal of Brand Management*", 9(4-5).

According to these, branding is a concept that has more than one meaning. It depends on what perspective one uses to define and implement it. When it comes to branding a nation, the concept has very little to do with advertising, public relations or marketing techniques, although it is composed of all of them. It involves much more then attempting to "sell" a country. It entails the construction of a good, prestigious name for a nation. As an old proverb says, *'Public Relations start at home!'* In explicit terms, branding is the strategy to earn a reputation[2] for the country and to make all its citizens want to behave in a way that the world recognizes and believes.

The reputation is highly dependent of the process of its transmission[3]. The relationships between the *reputation of a country* – as the central concept in branding - and *image* – as the traditional view on how a country is viewed in Anholt perspectives, are closely related. The reputation is a social concept, anonymous and socially constructed and propagated, and finally retransmitted to the individual level. While image is a product constructed by individuals, it is transmitted from one individual cognition to another.

A country's reputation – as one could infer from Anholt's theory – is contradicting the social cliché on a single aspect of mentalities: their striking

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[2] *Reputation* is a socially transmitted belief about belief. It concerns properties of agents, namely their attitudes towards some socially desirable behaviors: *cooperation, reciprocity, or norm-compliance*. It also encompasses the concern of the agent for transmission and the expanding of socially desirable behavior.

[3] Reputation transmission is a communication of an evaluation without the evaluator's specification. Reputation is a believed, social, meta-evaluation; it is built upon three distinct but interrelated objects:

1) a cognitive representation, or more precisely a *believed evaluation* - this could be somebody's image, but it is enough that this consists of a communicated evaluation;

2) a population object, i.e., a *propagating believed evaluation*;

3) an objective emergent property at the agent level, i.e., what *the agent is believed to be*.

Reputation is a highly dynamic phenomenon in two distinct senses: it is subject to change, especially as an effect of corruption, errors, deception, etc.; and it emerges as an effect of a multi-level bidirectional process. Briefly speaking, reputation is hardly to be earned, and easy to be loosed.

conservative tendency.

2. Romanian literature on what Romania is and could be

Section II is exploring, within Anholt's suggestions, the meaning of Romania. But, despite its continuity with Anholt, it does not look to documented results abroad, but to the internal sources. It is looking to the cultural roots of Romania's image, as a self-collective image, to its sources, to its peculiarities and to its problems. The attempt goes in the direction of reaching an abstract and symbolic concept, going beyond the geographic, economic or political reality, *hic et nunc*. It is to reach a philosophical, realistic, large, general, essential, and clear concept for and about all Romanian citizens, for all ex-citizens and for their descendents. This concept is meant to describe the attachments and the feelings of Romanians[4] to their symbolic and perennial collective being, toward their ideal of their country. In terms of branding, this self-image is the ground for creating a strategy intended to gain reputation. The hypothesis takes into consideration that the self-image of Romanians, at the starting point, is not anonymous and not without political target. It was culturally constructed and educationally transmitted.

The inquiry into the Romanian culture is an attempt to understand the evolution of Romania's self-image, as well as to understand the characteristics and structure of the current one.

Romania's construction and promotion of self-image, has a five stage dynamic:

I. This is the stage of the unique image of the *idealistic nation and ideal Romanianhood*[5] – historically known by the literature published from 1830 to 1918.

II. This is the stage of *multiple and adversary images*[6] . It is historically identifiable in the writings issued from 1918- 1945.

III. This stage is of the *single and controlled image* of the *anti-national and pro soviets* (pro-Moscow) communists' image; the image forged in a totalitarian

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[4] Here, Romanians are considered in cultural terms: as citizens, ex-citizens, the Romanian language speakers, the descendents of Romanians - in all these senses - and the other people that like to identify themselves as Romanians, by origins and/or by interests.

[5] T*he idealistic nation and ideal Romanianhood* were done and popularized as the single image by nation's builder of modernizers, unionists and nation defenders – where nation was tacked as an ethnical, orthodox and moral entity

[6] The *stage of multiple and adversary images* is the most creative stage in Romanian culture. A lot of images fighting bitterly one against the other, at home and in the European perimeter of cultures, ranking from these grounded in the nationalist xenophobic currents until the liberal and internationalists ones, with some critical figures characterize the period.

atmosphere, for its sake and goals.[7] It is historically known under the name "socialist realism," and it encompasses writings issued from 1945 to1965. It was the black period of Romanian culture because it remains in the collective memory by the cleansing[8] of Romanian culture by the nationalist and non-communist figures (social democrats, liberals, populars, and rightists) and by promoting prolet-cultists bureaucrats instead of creators.

IV. This is the stage of the *new nationalists, nationalist-communists[9] nationalist- communists[10]*. In historical terms from 1965 to 1989, but it has some echoes to the present.[11]

V. This is the stage of the *new multiple images* – rooted in very diverse philosophical grounds, connected with different stages of nation-image construction, and aimed to diverse goals – political, cultural or economical. Historically, this stage begins in 1990, celebrating the cultural communism collapse, and welcoming multiculturalism.

Looking for the characteristics of Romania and Romanians' contemporary image, culturally projected and socially reaccepted, we must say that it is a mixture of the images from very different stages, from very different political and philosophical perspectives. In addition, we must understand that the race among the images lacks the philosophy of welcoming the diversity. The race is still searching for unity and social diversity.

The main characteristics of the results of image promotion are their internal incongruence and their unprofessional branding and branding management.

The main components of this image are three. The first is the ridiculous claim, constantly and implicitly reinforced, that Romania is the center of world,

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[7] The stage of *single image* of the *anti-national and pro soviets* (pro Moscow) communists' image, the image forged in a totalitarian atmosphere, for its sake and goals. It was hardly controlled by the communist orthodoxy incumbents and continually censored.

[8] That means that they expulse all the national culture. They cleaned the culture of his national accent. They expelled from culture Eminescu / the poet asserted as National Poet –, Goga, a poet, Eliade, Blaga, Cioran, (the Romanian philosophers of the interwar period –). Even the communist philosophers Lucretiu Pătrăşcanu – the first Communist Minister of Justice – was persecuted and finally executed in 1954, and sent into prisons the majority of the members of Romanian Academy.

[9] This is not a very orthodox communist image (The censorship was abolished in 1970.) as it was not a single image. A current of socio-democratic views is hosted by the literature of translations. The Publishing House working under the name EDITURA POLITICA Publishing Company for Political Literature, in his division called IDEI CONTEMPRANE (Contemporary Ideas) had published more then 200 titles in contemporary philosophy, sociology, economy or even political non communist theory.

[10] This is not a very orthodox communist image (The censorship was abolished in 1970.) as it was not a single image. A current of socio-democratic views /hosted by the translated socio-political literature.

[11] Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Adrian Paunescu and Gigi Becali are its best exponents.

the *self-flattering image*. It is nurtured by the conservative nationalists, but influences citizens unfamiliar with the critical thinking developed in the perimeter of social sciences. Second, it concerns Romania learning to accept its global insignificance, the political rudeness and the immoral practices toward some of its citizens: *the nihilist image*. It is nurtured by the internationalist figures connected with Romania, and works among the cultural elite, sensitive to the ridiculousness of nationalists' claims and desiring to disclaim any relation to such claims. Third is Romania's image: Romania and Romanians have to review their own clichés about themselves, to analyze them, to come to an understanding of the structural incongruence and their political immaturity. It goes further requiring the design of a strategy for re-branding the country and the people. This is *the realist image*. It is supported by the pragmatic intellectual and is urging an audience among the intellectuals and young students in political science, journalism, sociology, communication or marketing.

The target of a coherent strategy could be designed as follows: understanding the importance of branding and identifying the real images of Romania today – inside and outside of the country – and working at their sources to de-stigmatize Romania and Romanians.

3. Re-branding Romania into a credible image of a country.

This is the main goal. Romania has to have the potential to contribute to the global effort of building a global society of prosperity, international justice, harmony and peace, with only peripheral and controlled anti-social or corruptive phenomenon.

The first essay drawing on an inventory of the contributions of various writers reflecting upon Romanianness/Romanianhood belongs to Mircea Vulcănescu in his article *Romanian Man*[12]. A new revised bibliography of the topic concerning the identifying of the cultural sources of Romanians nationalistic views is credited to Andrei Marga's, *Ethnical Identification to the Romanians* (1995)[13].

After reading some of the most notable books on identity the picture of the literature on Romanian's identity gets its own contour and complex profile. The

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[12] Mircea Vulcănescu, "Omul Românesc", in *Dimensiunea românească a existenţei* ("Romanian Man", in *Romanian Dimension of Beeing*) (1943), Fundaţia Culturală Română, Bucharest, 1991, pp. 16-18.
[13] Andrei Marga, "Identificare etnică la români" (Ethnical Identification to the Romanians), in A. Marga *Filosofia Unificării Europene* (The Philosophy of Europe' Unifing)**,** Biblioteca Apostrof Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 1995, pp. 226-238.

Romanian identity is constructed from three different perspectives: apologetic literature; the rejective; and the neutral or critical one. Therefore, the contributors could be called apologists, rejecters and analysts, and, consequently, the types of identity promoted are: an empathic one; a self-humiliating one; and a realistic one.

Despite an apparent contradiction between the three types of identity, the real traditional image of culturally constructed Romania makes sense only together. It is impossible to understand the self-humiliating views of Romanian promoters without some knowledge of the ridiculous presumptions of the apologists. It is also difficult to evaluate the injuries credited to the rejecters without data about how deeply they attack the bases of beliefs in an ideal Romania.

4. Anholt's Hexagon in Branding a Nation

This section is concerned with the presentation of Simon Anholt's Hexagon[14]. It is a pattern of measuring a country's good reputation and in establishing its place in nation brands index. The Anholt's theory is known as the Hexagon of branding. It consists in the representations, preferences and synthetic views that occur to an individual when he/she thinks of a specific nation. It is composed of the areas: 1. *Exports* – products put under the labels such as *Made in…*; 2. *Governance* – the image of the political life[15]; 3. *Investments and Immigration*, -- the views of how attractive a specific country is; 4. *Culture and heritage* – the cultural legacy of a country; 5. *People* – the notorious persons from a country and their popularity abroad; 6. *Tourism* – the attractions for the foreign tourist of a specific country.

This model aims to register knowledge, preferences and evaluations in every area of research noted on the hexagon.

1. According to Anholt's Hexagon, *Exports* consists of the consumer seeking a specific product *"Made in …"* and in the consumers' expectations to find a specific kind of product – at a specific standard - only under the label *"Made in…"*

2. *Governance* is referring to the public image of the political life. The respondents are asked to rank countries regarding their trust in their government, and the competence and fairness of the governance. (The political competence is

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[14] Simon Anholt is credited as a pioneer in the field. But there are also prestigious practitioners such as Wally Olins, Dr Nikolaus Eberl and numerous branding and public affairs agencies. There is one professional/academic journal in the field, Place Branding, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

[15] How trustworthy is the life in the nation under the current government? How responsible is the government toward poverty and international peace and security?

about how responsible are the incumbents of power towards poverty reduction, global peace and global environment preservation). Adjectives used to describe political life in a country are a synthetic indicator of the image of political life.

3. *Investments and Immigration* is measuring the attractiveness of a country. The respondents are asked about their knowledge, and their willingness to live and work in a country for a substantial period; about their desire for a diploma issued in a specific country, and finally for an adjective describing how attractive or unattractive a country appears to be.

4. *Culture and heritage* is the section where respondents' perceptions and knowledge of the cultural heritage (including sports) of a specific country are measured. The middle part of the questionnaire covers the expectations of respondents regarding the accomplishments of a specific country. Finally, it requests an adjective to describe the cultural heritage of a country.

5. *People* category registers the responses of respondents on the popularity of some exponents of a specific country; their preferences for particular people; and the synthetic adjective describing a specific population.

6. *Tourism* is registering the data provided by the tourist agencies and accepted by the respondents of the studied country. It also asks for comparisons of noted preferences. Finally, an adjective is requested to summarize the views of a country.

5. *An attempt to transfer Anholt's Hexagon to capture insiders' views*

Could Anholt's Hexagon be helpful in acquiring the good reputation of a country as the project of the country's own representatives?

Here, the answer is YES. The structure of the Hexagon does not differ when we look at it from the inside of a particular country. Anholt's Hexagon, with his intention to understand a country through marketed products; under the cognitive, evaluative and synthetic perspectives it is perfectly workable, from inside as well as from the outside.

But there are three types of difficulties that may interfere when one tries to use the model as an empirical tool to gather from the insiders, data related to their country brand. The first is: the brand of a country from outside is a fact outside of common experience, but inside is an elite concern. The second difficulty is: outside, the cognitive, evaluative and synthetic elements reported are direct incentives to "buy" the country, but for the insiders the elements selected are only subjective views or propaganda attempts. The third difficulty to be taken into consideration is with outside data the numbers are speaking directly and correct —

not so for the insiders. The insiders' answers are influenced by their current position (responsibility and power influences the nation- branding process); by their personal values and cultural heritage (sophistication to synchronize the branding of their country with the contemporary solution working globally in the world market); and their political experience (capacity of overlooking their personal sufferings and ambitions for their party's interests).

In the research process, the first difficulty can be surpassed by constructing the sample with elites only. In addition, it is important that the respondents are interested in every field of the Hexagon. The second one is to use two different methods: diversity of respondents in the sample; and corroboration of data collected with official and independent data. The third difficulty can be overcome by detailed commentary on every report.

Working with insiders in data gathering could turn into a major advantage in implementation of a branding strategy. The insiders' sensitivity to the effects of the brand; their involvements in the process of exploring ways to gain this good reputation increase their responsibility in creating a brand and popularizing it among their fellow citizens.

The components of this approach are the same for the insiders as for their buyers from outside. Unfortunately, to identify these components is much more difficult from inside because of the great amount of detail which influence the insiders' views. Anholt's Hexagon is just the theoretical tool to separate the significant from the insignificant areas, and to find a hierarchy among the data gathered in each field.

To respond to the challenge of constructing an instrument workable with the insiders as respondents we used the Anholt suggestions. We projected a sample with Romanian elites and designed a specific guide[16].

The data of the respondents are meant to prevent the third difficulty indicated by the researcher in the influence of the position of the report.

The structure of the Guide is an Anholt structure including each of his sections, but we decided for a different hierarchy of fields. The hierarchy is connected with elite concern in building a brand. It ranks from 1 to 6, the exports, investment potential, outside culture promotion, governance, politicians' image, tourism attractions, description of Romanians *using* two adjectives.

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[16] The guide is not exactly in Anholt's style. That is because it has to be as short as possible. Therefore, not included in the guide are questions to capture knowledge, preferences and adjectives for every item. It has to be non-directive, to allow respondents to respond freely. It has to include the categories and the elements that relate to the promotion of a Romanian brand, as well as including that which could lead to stigmatizing the country in the eyes of others.

The structures of any question, and consequently, the answers may be polarized therefore both on the positive side of an area means juxtaposition with the negative one.

Having this option, we have five of the most frequently mentioned elements of branding in each field designed by Anholt; and the five most stigmatizing elements regarding the image and perception of Romania.

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