

PARTICULARITIES OF PLACE BRANDING
IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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This article examines the role of place branding in the image forming of certain European countries. The relevance of the article is confirmed by an acute need to identify the factors and branding tools that should be taken into account while a country develops a brand and influences the process of image forming. The purpose of the article is to examine successful examples and failures of the branding strategies of some European countries and cities. The results have to identify similarities and differences in the approach of European countries to promote a certain area as a part of country branding; to determine the key success factors that lead a country to the recognition by the international community.

Key words: *place branding, European countries, Moldova, image promotion, world space, Public Relations (PR).*

În articol este cercetat rolul brandului teritoriilor în formarea imaginii unor țări europene. Actualitatea articolului este confirmată de necesitatea acută în determinarea factorilor și a instrumentelor de brand, care se iau în vedere la elaborarea brandului de țară și influențează procesul de creare a imaginii teritoriilor. Scopul articolului constă în studierea exemplelor de succes și de insucces de utilizare a strategiilor de brand de către unele orașe și țări europene. Rezultatele cercetării constau în evidențierea asemănărilor și deosebirilor în abordarea strategiilor de brand de către țările europene în promovarea teritoriilor și în determinarea factorilor de succes, care contribuie la recunoașterea țării pe arena mondială.

Cuvinte-cheie: *brandizarea teritoriilor, țări europene, Moldova, promovarea imaginii, spațiu mondial, relații publice.*

В данной статье исследуется роль брендинга территорий в формировании имиджа определенных Европейских стран. Актуальность статьи подтверждается острой необходимостью определения факторов и инструментов брендинга, которые учитываются при разработке бренда и влияют на процесс создания имиджа территории. Цель статьи заключается в изучении успешных и неудачных примеров проведения брендинга некоторых Европейских стран и городов. Результаты работы состоят в выявлении сходств и различий в подходе Европейских стран к продвижению территорий в рамках брендинга, а также в определении факторов успеха, которые приводят страну к признанию мировым сообществом.

Ключевые слова: *брендинг территорий, европейские страны, продвижение имиджа, мировое пространство, связь с общественностью.*

JEL Classification: *M37, M29, M39, O18, P25.*

Introduction. Europe is not only the countries members of the European Union, but the whole European continent with the territory of 10505000 square kilometers. This is the territory from Ural to Portugal, from Rome to the Kola Peninsula. The eastern borders lie along the foot of the Urals and Kazakhstan, up to the Caspian Sea. Turkey, Cyprus, Madeira, the Canary and Azores islands are also parts

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of Europe. This huge geographic area (4340 km in length) is a market with 800 million people who speak approximately sixty different languages.

Although Europe occupies only 4% of the globe, 14% of the world population lives here. Altogether the factors comprise the greatest world market from the point of view of its purchasing power. Many investors are attracted by the economical potential of the market. Taking into consideration this definition of Europe, more than 100 thousand territorial units are taken into consideration. Every unit has its own image, problems, and possibilities for positioning [1].

Speaking of European countries and their importance nowadays it is necessary to mention that their possibilities have never been as good as they are now. Europe becomes one of the biggest markets of the world. Due to this fact, the problem of achieving dominance in European market, which is equal the global market has never been so acute. In this case, the competitors will revive and induce new partners and strong players. Star players, the strongest in the world, own those brands that find new branding tools to achieve the “first place” in the severe competition.

There is another category of places (mostly, they are from the post-Soviet territory), that do not acknowledge their national identity, which is not acceptable for the creation and promotion of the proper brand. These categories of countries need more time to achieve the goal and an absolutely different approach to the methods of creation and implementation of the branding strategy. Most of the activities to be done in order to have a positive, strong, recognizable brand will become clearly only when the country formulates its national identity and key values. This is one of the most important stages of the place branding.

Thus, every territory needs a strategic marketing plan for a changing and demanding environment to benefit from newly created situations [5]. There are specific factors which define the marketing results of the territory, functioning on the European market. First of all, there is the necessity to achieving dominance on the territory of Europe, where the strongest place brands are situated. Regardless whether we speak of tourist attractiveness of Paris, automobile power of the Southern Germany or financial virtuosity of London, the branding capital of these countries is enormous. Europe doesn't have competitors on other continents from the point of view of its historical and cultural wealth [2].

Moreover, these huge resources comprise not only tourist sightseeing places, but also qualified work forces, important industrial clusters and a wide variety of people and languages. In reality, there are thousands of places in Europe that have specific advantages in specific domains of the place branding. However, the problems of supporting the territories with existing brands and encouraging new players to reach the leadership should be solved, because the European territories become more and more responsible for their branding and marketing. Small places have already faced the necessity to look for new outstanding strategies to compete on a market full of rivals. These problems are acute for Europe due to high level of competition and support of local interests. The winners will construct their territories to maximize their marketing and brand influence. The territories already implement internal and external examinations searching for external sources for the realization of their goals, build intentional relationships between buyers and sellers, market their infrastructure and manage it, and skillfully promote their products on the market.

The amount of all factors that form the place brand and branding company, might seem to be huge for the small territories and for the territories which have just started to realize the necessity of the activities. Nevertheless, there is a great number of examples in Europe when strong leadership and systematic measures overcome the problems which appear due to the size, geographical position of the place and other factors which influence the attractiveness of the territory. Almost all territories in Europe have hard times now; some territories are in worse positions, others are in better ones. *Dying* territories or territories in the *permanent crises* are in the worst situation. The states which are at present in a critical situation or in the process of restructuring economy appeared in Europe during the last decades. There are no internal resources to start the process of improving the situation in these disadvantaged territories (the basic industry and businesses are lost; there is a high level of unemployment, etc.).

There are also territories in a *dragging out a miserable existence, but with revival potential* (in spite of all the problems they possess historical, cultural, commercial and even political potential). The renewal processes become possible if a good leader appears and a concept of perspective development is elaborated.

Other places have *signs of both prosperity and recession*. Due to specific combination of industrial enterprises and developing companies these territories are very sensitive to fluctuations of the business

cycles. Many European places are in a more favorable position as positive changes have already been fulfilled there. These territories elaborated specific effective countries with the accent on specific branding strategies in order to create conditions to increase their own attractiveness. Some territories deserved the title to be “*selected*”. They have strong position; they keep attracting businessmen, new residents, tourists.

Identification of special features and estimation of the process of place branding elaboration in various situations, pursuing different goals and visioning of the strategy, involving different necessary structures into the process may serve as examples of successful or failing branding companies in European countries that are shown in this article.

Place branding case studies on the Western European countries

The first case study is dedicated to **Scotland** that belongs to category named “small countries”. Nowadays, the process of globalization performs new challenges to small countries that have a big risk to become marginalized due to the world changes in economic, political, social and even cultural life. It requires being more than attentive to the country brand forming and its supporting programs. Almost 330 companies were given the right to use this logo of Scotland for their goods, and not necessarily traditional national products like whisky or textile.

Particularly, British Telecom Scotland or Bank of Scotland place this image on their promotional materials, invoices and other documents; the Scotland label is used by the producers of electronics, software, oil products and representatives of other domains of modern technologies, Scotland wants to be associated to. A specification system for the goods, claiming to receive the logo was elaborated; the product must be produced in Scotland and meet the quality standards of the domain. More than this, there were formulated a number of requirements to the producers: perfect reputation, annual turnover not less than 50 thousand pounds, constant improvement of the quality of goods. Around 20% of the companies that have applied for Scotland the Brand license have been refused since they didn't meet the quality requirements. The companies used to pay a certain amount of money for the right to place the Scottish logotype (for example, starting from 250 up to one or ten thousand pounds plus VAT annually for the companies whose annual turnover is more than 10 million pounds), and in order to use the logo a special preliminary permission needed to be obtained [4].

As a result, big chain stores noticed that “Scottish consumers were increasingly keen to buy produce that proclaims its Scottish origins. All the major supermarkets have set up sections for Scottish foodstuffs; and most of them are buying more of their goods from Scottish sources in order to meet demand. Scotland's economic development agencies hope that this upsurge in patriotic buying can be spread to overseas markets. Scotland the Brand campaign had a big impact first of all on internal areas, forming in its turn positive components of Scottish product brands among local publics (which is important for each branding campaign) with the perspective to achieve the same recognition abroad. All the implemented initiatives haven't brought any changes in Scotland brand perception. Scotland now remains one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. It is obvious, that this is one of the most advantageous parts of its brand. That is why it is reasonable to pay more attention at this direction and develop it properly with the help of different special events, festivals, press tours etc.

Eastern European countries place branding campaigns examples

A good example of forming own image and branding can be seen in the campaigns of the Eastern European countries which have recently joined the European Union. Nobody will deny the fact that the European Union, which has become a brand itself, has been able to create a powerful positive motivation for the neighboring countries for integration. This has been the main tool of external influence of the EU. Evaluating the possibilities of the European Union policy in Eastern Europe, it is obvious that this problem shouldn't be considered in similarity with the EU influence during the last fifteen years on the countries of the former Eastern Europe which are called the countries of the Central Europe nowadays. The difference is in the fact that the EU clearly defined the perspective of the membership referring the countries of Central Europe. This was the fact that produced a stabilizing impact on both internal political processes and relationships between the neighboring countries of an EU potential member. Internal stability, control over authoritarian tendencies and radical nationalism were also mainly determined by this factor in Central European countries and the Baltic republics.

Poland: in search of its national symbol

The initiatives of the national brand promotion can be illustrated based on the example of Poland. The development of the national brand became an acute problem for Poland when it was on the eve of

joining the EU. Immediately a question appeared: what kind of country is it for the future partners in the integration process?

The image turned out to be far from being positive. Poland was often associated with the chaos in economy, sluggishness, vodka, Catholic Church, machinations, auto theft and cheap labour force. Thus, Poland lacked positive symbols which could be recognized abroad. Nevertheless, the European community was impressed by a very specific brand promotion activity: the creation of a mythical Polish plumber (Fr. Plombier polonais, Pol. polski hydraulic). It represented a symbolic image of cheap working force from Central Europe which would migrate to the “old” EU countries as a result of their adoption. This image became popular especially in France. The “Polish plumber” became a symbol of threat to the living standards of French workers due to European integration. The image of the “Polish plumber” was “tapped” by Poland itself as the answer to the painful polonophobic reaction in the country. Hence, a billboard in French appeared which showed a plumber inviting tourists to visit Poland. “Do you live in France? Do your pipes leak? A muscular and extremely handsome Polish plumber won’t come to help you! I will stay in Poland, come here if you want!” This advertising campaign is an excellent example of achieving public resonance and popularity based on trivial assets. Having shown the fear of Frenchmen from a humorous and kind point of view, the creators of the “plumber” promoted efficiently not only the product but also softened the Frenchmen’s attitude making the advertisement of the Polish resorts social, since beautiful landscapes of Poland were shown on the background of the billboard. As a result, this branding initiative was considered as the “aggressive” one and led to absolute dislike from the side of the targeted publics.

It is obvious that all the initiatives that Poland will implement in the future should be coordinated and accomplished according to the European Union requirements. In addition, it would be better if these initiatives were not too aggressive in order to keep positive attitudes from the side of the other European Union members.

Estonia: the country of contrasts

Estonia faced the same problems as Poland did. It was supposed to enter EU within “the first wave” of Eastern European countries. From the point of view of Western European countries it didn’t differ much from its Baltic neighbors and didn’t have a positive image. For Swedes and Finns Estonia was associated with “alcoholic tourism” which didn’t represent the country positively. It is obvious, that changing stereotypes was the prior objective in the branding program. The Government of Estonia directed its activity towards the creation of the Brand Estonia.

The core objective was to demonstrate the main national values and specific features of the country, to establish a new image of the state for its western and eastern neighbors. Its objectives also were to enable Estonia to achieve greater success in attracting foreign-direct investments, to expand its tourist base beyond Sweden and Finland, and to broaden the European markets for exports. Unlike Poland, Estonia set several objectives, regarding the promotion of the main country advantages. The tools for Estonia brand creation were as follows:

- 1) Active participation in the international level cultural competitions such as Eurovision.
- 2) Providing different services to Estonian businessmen who worked abroad and foreign entrepreneurs who were willing to start cooperation with Estonian companies.
- 3) Providing high-level travel tours in order to acquaint foreign visitors with Estonian marvelous nature.
- 4) Creation of a special brand logo of Estonia.

We offer a more detailed stop at the last point. A brand logo creation was an important tool to reflect the uniqueness of Estonia in comparison with other countries. Thus, the label with the text “Welcome to Estonia” was created in a shape, which slightly resembled the contour of the country on the map. Although it wasn’t performed in the national color gamut, it was elaborated in red and white colors. The colors were considered to be changed depending on a particular situation (initially, the logo was using cool Nordic color schemes). At that time the slogan of the Brand Estonia promotion campaign “Positively Transforming” appeared. The slogan was supposed to symbolize the changes taking place in Estonia at that time and to emphasize the newly appeared contrasts.

With a strategic design and typeface, this logo has become widespread throughout the country, accepted by Estonia’s national airline, businesses, tourism industry, and shipping docks. In addition to the logo, the campaign also has a graphic background pattern to serve as another symbol of Estonia’s new brand. Small geometric shapes inspired by Estonian embroidery and knitting represent tradition, while the

vibrant color palette mixes in the contemporary – a combination which the nation intends to represent their culture. The brand was considered universal and easily understood by foreigners.

As a conclusion we can add, that the “Welcome to Estonia” brand later was criticized and even mocked in Estonia. Many companies and firms use it; however, it should be used in a more efficient way. The “Welcome to Estonia” brand logo was a core step of the branding program that opened a lot of discussions on basic colors, shape and slogan. From one side it is a positive fact because it means that this program captured public’s attention. From the other side, there was a big risk of brand perception confusing. Nevertheless, it still exists till today and according to many financial and marketing specialists opinions, the country had benefitted from this brand.

Place branding case study on the European city

Lisbon – the dynamic exotic

Let us examine the case that became the example of successful branding campaign towards place branding. Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, promoted by one of the leading groups of French consulting agencies “Information et Enterprise” (I&E). This initiative was intended as a supporting action for the Portugal tourism company Turismo de Lisboa (TL). The initial objective of this project became inclusion Lisbon in the top 10 of the most desirable world tourist destinations. The targeted publics became tourist markets of France, Spain, Germany, England and Italy, the most important markets in term of visitors. Let us look at the branding campaign targeted to the French audience.

One of the most important points in each branding campaign is clear understanding of your target media. I&E applied an in-depth approach to this step and revealed the following media categories: the core media tools were the professional tourism press, general news press, general tourism press, feminine press, national dailies and national radios; the next step assumed regional dailies, TV press, National TV, senior press; the last media tools were press agencies, youth press, family press, food press, men’s press, health press, cultural press, communication press, “time out” press. What is important I&E realized that dealing with target media means a big necessity of being flexible in their relations with the media. They had to be reactive and seize up all worthwhile editorial opportunities [3]. During the dealing with targeted media it has been revealed also that the audience’s attention was caught by the paradox between the old and the new Lisbon and the “unseen” Lisbon.

In order to be more efficient in French media relations there was applied an original tool – the Turismo de Lisboa press office positioning in Paris as a source of information on Lisbon and the surrounding area, where the media representatives could get brochures, leaflets illustrations and videos of Lisbon and its area for immediate reaction to media request as well as potential partnership. The ongoing activities of the press office included identification of editorial features, responding to media requests, updating and creation of adapted tools and resources for effective media relations. Among these activities the attention was also focused on the press tours organization (it is one of the most effective tools in order to promote any place properly) and reporting (monthly activity report or press review and yearly report of the PR actions). Thus, the press office was an unique source of information for the French media.

An essential part of the Lisbon branding campaign was participation in existing events in Paris such as Bedouk Show the France’s leading trade fair. It is an annual event for everyone involved in the sectors of incentive. The target audiences are decision makers and buyers from worldwide travel companies and agencies. Another event was MIT International) the world’s largest trade fair group tourism professionals (over 90 countries represented). The target audiences were foreign tourism companies. The last step of the program became increasing visibility of the web sites. Today the TL’s website is regularly mentioned in most press articles due to a dedicated space on TL’s website creation for a “travel assistance” to Internet users (pages with a direct link to a personalized e-mail address) and interactive links development with specialized Lisbon Tour Operators’ websites.

What is the result of the work? Lisbon started to gain its position in chronological progression. It was marked by a new perception of Lisbon in the French mass-media; the city started to be recognized as a dynamically developing European capital where “something always happened”. For the representatives of the French mass-media there was organized a press-centre in Paris. To provide new and up-to-date topics for the newly edited materials the whole information about Lisbon was accumulated here. Year after year the city becomes more recognizable (especially in France) thanks to the scrupulous work with mass-media. Press and audio-visual materials became more profound, the life of the city was described from different positions that led to increasing interest of the public to this newly discovered place. Internet proved to be another effective tool of the promotion campaign. Different “useful” links to satisfy any

interest of the public connected to Lisbon were provided on various sites. Nowadays Internet is one of the most important sources of information.

Conclusion. The branding campaigns of the selected European countries reviewed in this article performed, that each place has its own particularities that depend on different factors: tasks and objectives, target audiences, inhabitants' mentality, professionalism level and budget for branding campaign. It is revealed that without professional approach the only result of such efforts is failure, because each of these points needs an in-depth audit for further dealing with it. Below are performed the main mistakes that places (in our case, countries and cities) faced in the branding process implementation:

- *National idea commercialization.* It leads, like in the case of Scotland, to false brand perception and mistrust among local inhabitants and foreign audiences.
- *One part of national brand promotion.* In case of Poland that narrowed down its tasks for its brand promotion to some of goods brands export, it also lead to a false brand perception.
- *Aggressive promotional initiatives.* Basing on the Poland's example (the aggressive promotion of the Polish Plumbing Technician in Europe) we can claim, they lead to absolute dislike from the side of the targeted publics.
- *Alternatives efforts of the country brand promotion.* The example on Estonia performs that it is impossible to promote 2 images of one country.

Hereby, it is necessary to perform another category of key success factors of places branding campaigns reflected:

- *Initial proper image forming;*
- *Concrete tasks and objectives settings;*
- *Determination of concrete key messages and national values that should be promoted;*
- *Proper visual brand logo elaboration that would reflect the main place's values;*
- *Determination of a common national idea;*
- *Partnership with a big number of different media structures that allow to perform a place brand from different sides;*
- *Clear determination of a place brand's negative sides in order to get rid of them.*

Due to the case studies, we revealed in addition that one of the most important things in each place branding campaign is to begin promotional initiatives within a certain place among local publics in order to turn the inhabitants into the main part of the place brand.

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