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BUCHAREST AS A CITY BRAND: HOW TO ATTRACT RUSSIAN TOURISTS

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to investigate the attractiveness of Bucharest and its perception by Russian tourists as well as to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the city and define the idea for positioning statement for this place. Bucharest has a deep history and cultural heritage that are highly appreciated by tourists seeking cultural tourism. Moreover, Bucharest had the nickname of "Little Paris" which implied the beauty of the city. Our study focuses mainly on the target audience of Russian people who appreciate cultural heritage. According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), the number of Russians who visited Romania as tourists increased by 73% in the first quarter of 2015 (<http://russtd.com/destinations/eastern-europe-loses-almost-half-russian-tourists-year>). This increase is a positive sign as it means that Romania and Bucharest are becoming more and more attractive for Russian tourists. Tourists can bring many benefits to the place, both economic and social. In turn, new places with heritage can enrich tourists with new knowledge and broaden their erudition. The study allows us to understand the perception of Bucharest by Russian tourists and single out the key elements of the city of Bucharest. The key elements of the city of Bucharest are rooted in cultural heritage and authenticity, including different styles of architecture, Orthodox churches, classical and folk music, outstanding musicians and food. Bucharest might thus be offered the positioning as a mysterious authentic city revealing the coexistence of different times. To some extent this paper contributes to the understanding of the image of Bucharest in Russian tourists' eyes, their associations and fears. It gives some insights into factors that make Russians choose touristic destinations. In addition, some ideas for the city positioning, logos and slogans can derive from this paper. The study can be useful for touristic agencies or for the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism which deal with the touristic flow and country image.

Keywords: city brand, values, multi-sensory experience, cultural heritage.

Introduction

Cities resemble personalities and can be described with human characteristics. New York is contemporary, wealthy and individualistic; Paris is aristocratic,

fashionable and chic; Berlin is versatile, dynamic and artistic. People can have very strong emotional connections with cities that earn a special place in their minds and lives. Cities have to deal with a variety of target audiences,

including tourists. Tourists can bring many benefits to the place, both economic and social. The business starts boosting, new working places open up. Moreover, tourism is very good for the international reputation of the place. If tourists actively visit the city, it means that the place has something special to offer to them.

City brands have similarities with “classical” brands of goods and services. Usually a brand is defined as a set of associations, a name with the power to influence the market (Kapferer, 2012). The same can be said about places. The city brand is the sum of all perceptions and associations nurtured by people, with respect to the city (Ispas A., Boboc D.-G., Marica A.-G., Năstăsoiu G.-B., Vijoli C.-V., 2015). Places can cause strong specific associations. For example, Italy is about sweet life (“Dolce Vita”), France is about charm and luxury, Germany – order (“Ordnung”) (Ochkovskaya, Gerasimenko, Rybalko, 2014). Usually each place is characterised by a combination of unique attraction factors making it different from the competing ones (Rainisto S., 2004). According to Dinnie, if destinations want to flourish, they must deliver distinctive, compelling, memorable and rewarding experiences to their target consumers (Dinnie, 2008).

Working on this research, we studied papers devoted to positioning Romania and the Romanian cities (e.g. Sibiu) as tourism destinations. Dumitrescu L., Cetina I., Pentescu A. analyzed Romania’s image using mainly the online travel guides (2014). According to their research, Romania is characterized as rather positive and can attract a special group of tourists “who travelled to many countries, being open-minded towards other destinations and who are looking for

memorable travel experiences...” (Dumitrescu L., Cetina I., Pentescu A., 2014, p. 62).

In our research we concentrated on Bucharest and the perception of the city by Russian tourists. The study of the Russians’ perception of the city of Bucharest has not been carried out so far.

The paper is structured in the following way. First, we briefly summarized the relevant literature about city brands and some successful examples. Second, we presented our research about the sensory realization of the city of Bucharest. Then we conducted an online survey of the perception of the city by Russian people. Finally, we provided the research limitations and gave some recommendations on how to increase the awareness of Bucharest among Russian tourists.

Literature review

City brand and its identity

Every city has a connection with its country. Living in Russia, we can characterize this country as versatile and traditional. Moscow, being a capital, imbibes its versatility and traditions. Dumitrescu L. and his colleagues describe points-of-difference for Romania such as authenticity and traditions (Dumitrescu L., Cetina I., Pentescu A., 2014, p.63). These descriptions of Romania are incorporated in the city of Bucharest as well.

Capitals represent the countries’ heritage and the whole nations. The identity of the capital is very important to the country’s image (Agata Lisiak, 2009). As noted above, Paris has an identity of a chic and aristocratic city, so France is perceived as an aristocratic country as well.

The city identity is based on specific city characteristics, values and benefits. Sometimes it is not easy to formulate one clear identity, specifically, for the capitals which are usually versatile. The identity of Bucharest is multifaceted as it reflects the shades of different times: ancient, soviet and contemporary eras.

Cities can cause associations in tourists' minds by appealing to their senses. A multi-sensory brand experience, including sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, generates certain beliefs, feelings, thoughts and opinions to create a brand image in the consumer's mind (Hulten B., 2011). The cities also provide a sensory

experience, which is important to tourists' impressions as well as to the locals.

Sight experience in case of cities concerns with visual objects such as buildings, monuments, nature, pieces of art and installations. Unique architecture, both old and contemporary, can differentiate the city. In Huainan in China the unusual Piano and Violin shaped building was erected in 2007 (figure 1). This building with its unique shape has become very popular for tourists and local citizens. The locals named this architectural object "the most romantic building in China" ("Unusual places", <http://unusualplaces.org/piano-house>).



Figure 1. The Piano and Violin shaped building

Source: <http://fine-archi.blogspot.ru>

Visual identity of the city also includes logos which should be easily memorized and reflect the values of the

city. The practice of having several informal logos exists in some cities. For example, Moscow has many unofficial

logos. Designers create logos for Moscow and display them online for discussion. Picture № 8 is the official emblem of the city presenting St.

George Killing a Dragon. Yet, this emblem is not easily reproduced (figure 2).



Figure 2. Different logos of the city of Moscow

Source: Logos are taken from open sources

Reflecting the idea and values of the city, Moscow red logos express the idea of Red Square, the main landmark of the city. Furthermore, in the old Russian language the adjective «red»

(красный) had a meaning of «beautiful».

The other example, a logo of Copenhagen, reflects its openness for people and its “green” values (figure 3).



Figure 3. Logo of the city of Copenhagen

Hearing is about the language, songs, music, poetry, city and street names and the specific memorized “noise” related to the city. Internationally famous songs have power to make the places famed even without visiting them (e.g., “It’s a long way to Tipperary”, “A Paris” by Yves Montand, “New York, New York” by Frank Sinatra, “Berlin” by Klaus Hoffmann, etc.). Although in most

cases classical music and poetry reflect the culture of the whole country, these verbal ingredients are associated with the capital as well. In addition, a slogan, mirroring the concept of the city, constitutes the verbal identity as well.

The combination of a logo and a slogan for Seoul reflects the positive and friendly atmosphere of this multicultural city (figure 4).



Figure 4. A logo and a slogan for the city of Seoul

Some cities are associated with a special smell which remains embedded in people’s memory. There is linden blossom in Berlin at the street Unter den Linden. The French city of Cannes blossoms with perfume. The Italian cities smell of coffee specifically in the morning. Not all aromas, however, promote positive emotions. The gas and piggery smell can have a negative effect on impressions of a city.

When people touch the objects which are peculiar for the place, they can feel something special, e.g., sense of belonging to its history or culture. Touching the remnants of the Berlin Wall, Russian varnished souvenir matryoshkas, Dutch wooden clogs, etc., ensures special tactile experiences and impressions.

The more senses are involved in exploring the city, the more strongly the

impressions and associations can contribute to the city identity.

Cities with a positive image and identity are able to better meet the demands of their different stakeholders such as residents, tourists, investors (Herstein R., 2014). Many experts in city development consider that the key audience for city branding is local residents. If the local residents are satisfied with their living standards and atmosphere in the city, the other audiences such as tourists and investors will be delighted as well. Moreover, locals should be involved in the process of city branding, even though the brand is intended for tourists. It can be of interest for those who are responsible for city branding to take a closer look at Buenos Aires experience. In 2006 the Department of Tourism Promotion and Development

organized a short film competition of alternative views of Buenos Aires to help imagine the new city's tourist brand. The idea was to find fresh views of the city not typically included in the conventional tourism promotion (Dinardi C., 2015). Being involved, locals feel their belonging to the city brand which does not seem alien to them.

In our paper we concentrated on tourists, specifically Russian tourists.

Study methodology approach

In order to explore perceptions of Bucharest and its potential to become an international city brand, this research was developed in two parts: an analytical inquiry and a descriptive exploration. First, we analysed the sensory realization of Bucharest. Second, we investigated the perception of Bucharest by Russian people.

The investigation of perception of Bucharest consisted of two stages: in-depth interviews and an online survey. The in-depth interviews were conducted among 20 respondents, leisure travellers to European countries. All the respondents have higher education degrees, appreciate cultural tourism and travel with a touristic purpose to European cities outside the borders of Russia at least once per 24 months. The in-depth interviews allowed us to formulate the following research questions:

RQ1: Do Russians travel to Bucharest and to other big cities in Eastern Europe?

RQ2: What really matters for Russian tourists keen on travelling to Europe while choosing their destination?

RQ3: What associations and fears about Bucharest do Russian tourists have?

RQ4: Does the communism heritage attract Russian tourists?

RQ5: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the city of Bucharest?

RQ6: What cultural objects in Bucharest are the most attractive to Russians?

RQ7: What knowledge of Bucharest do people have (famous people, works of art)?

RQ8: Does belonging to an Orthodox church make Romania more attractive to the Russian?

RQ9: Does the statement "Bucharest is a little Paris" make it more alluring?

RQ10: What sources of information do Russians use when choosing a trip?

Then, we conducted an online survey which helped us find answers to these questions. The questionnaire was designed to elicit Russians' perceptions of Bucharest and to investigate potential ideas for positioning of the city.

We placed the questionnaire on survio.com. A lot of pictures of Bucharest were included in the questionnaire to make the impression of Bucharest for those who have not been there yet. After that, the link was posted on Facebook. The first question was a filter and asked whether the respondents have travelled to Eastern Europe (outside their own country). 416 respondents took part in the survey. 17 of these respondents travel only round Russia. So we had to exclude them from the sample. 399 respondents visited at least one city in Eastern Europe. According to the United Nations Eastern Europe consists of the following 10 countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine. The names of the big cities were given as potential