

BRAND IMAGE OF BRAȘOV CITY

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Abstract. Dans le contexte de la concurrence globale, les villes sont obligées de se différencier de leurs compétiteurs, de trouver et de médiatiser de façon soutenue les éléments qui les rendent spéciales et de découvrir la voie pour devenir un lovemark (une marque aimée et respectée). L'étude vise à identifier ces éléments et, éventuellement, les discordances observées entre la ville promue et la ville vécue. La ville de Brasov est une des plus grandes villes de la Roumanie qui a possédée pendant le temps plusieurs images, en fonction du contexte historique et économique (l'image d'une ville commerciale, l'image d'une ville industrielle et l'image d'une ville touristique). Les changements économiques depuis 1990 ont conduit vers le déclin du secteur industriel et la fermeture des entreprises industrielles. En ce cas, on a assisté à la transformation d'une ville industrielle dans une ville des ruines industrielles. Sans un secteur industriel fort et en profitant des conditions géographiques et du passé historique, Brasov est devenu une ville avec des valences touristiques, cette caractéristique étant fréquemment mentionné par les participants d'une enquête qui évaluait l'image actuelle de Braș ov. L'image de marque de Brasov n'est pas encore très bien tracer, mais la ville bénéficie des quelques atouts (comme l'histoire, le patrimoine, la position géographique, les habitants) afin de créer une image forte et différente.

Keywords: *city of Brasov, image, perception, symbol*

1. Introduction

The concept of brand image is rather an economical than geographical one, referring to the brand image (visual representation). According to the American Marketing Association, “the brand is a name, a term, a design, a symbol or something else that may distinguish a seller of goods and services of the other sellers” (Șerbulescu, 2007). In this study, the notion of brand image is used in terms of urban geography, referring to the image able to differentiate a town from another, that symbol, sign, name that has the ability to evoke in the collective mentality the dominant positive features of a certain place. The brand image doesn't refer only to the material side (the way a certain place looks like), but also to the emotional side of that place (so-called brand image that translates the degree of emotionality, of people's attachment to a certain place. A place that is only respected not loved as well, is likely to lose interest when the consumer discovers another location that offers similar services but which knows how to become loved by people.

A place can be identified through an extensive gallery of images but a special attention must be given to that image recognised by the majority of people as a representative one, able to activate both respect and emotional side of the potential buyers (that means to be not only an image but a “lovemark”) (Samama, 2003).

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Urban image is a relatively new concept (appeared in '60s) in the literature, that raise increasingly more interest of foreign researchers, but still not enough the Romanian researchers' interest. According to I. Ianos (2004), the urban image summarizes "the reality expressed to the essence of a town, filtered by a subject and circulated in the form of information", that means a town image is "the connection between real space, objective, and its perception" (Kavaratzis *apud* Kampschulte, 1999). The building, the maintenance and the permanent adaptation of the urban brand image have become a necessity in the current context. In the terms of global competition, towns are forced to differentiate from their competitors, to find and continuously cover the elements that make them unique, to discover the way to become a lovemark. In order to differentiate and build a local brand, towns all over the world include, more or less efficiently, in the administrative practice and the government policy as many techniques and marketing methods as possible.

In the context where the motto of J. Trout (2006), "Differentiate or die" becomes more and more actual, the Romanian towns, without the American or west-european towns experience (concerning the competitive behaviour and the adaptation of economic marketing techniques to the urban space) slowly risking to lose themselves in anonymity. The rescue could be the finding of an identity anchor, whose image to awaken in the people' mental all assertive features of the town. An image can affect so much the opinions and the spatial behaviour of the consumers: a positive image denotes an attractive place, where the person will show a topofil behaviour (he will be interested in that place) while a negative image indicates a repulsive place, which the person will tend to avoid (topofob behaviour). The urban representation encompasses two realities or two towns: the objective reality ("the external town", Graham, 2002) and the perceived reality ("the internal town", Graham, 2002), identified through surveys.

Before promoting a town image at a national level, it has to be realised that the first ones that get connected to this image are the local people, they becoming, indirectly, image ambassadors. So, the image promoted outside must be in accordance with the perspective that the owners of that place have, because a significant difference between "the city promoted" and "the city lived" put visitors in need, leading to the decrease of confidence in the product purchased. A viable brand image, managed properly, brings benefits to the owner and to the consumer as well (Figure 1).

The main goal of the study involves the identification of the brand image of Brasov city from the perspective of residents. Also, it is concerned the evaluation of residents' perceptions with respect to the economic, social and cultural situation of their town.

2. Geographical position of the Brasov city and its importance

The city of Brasov, residence of Brasov, is one of the largest cities of Romania, with a population of 277.569 (in accordance with the National Statistics Institute, 2010). The city is situated in Bârsa southeastern basin, at an altitude of 550 m, at the foot of Tâmpa, part of the massive Postăvaru.

Historical documents prove the existence of an urban settlement, named Corona, since 1234 (as it comes from "Catalogues Ninivensis", published in 1949 by Norbert Backmund (Binder, 1970). Starting with XIVth century, Brasov becomes the most important settlement of the depression and one of the biggest urban settlements of Transylvania.

The geographical position of the city (both at the microscale-inside the basin, and at the macroscale-at the transition from Transylvania to the Romanian Country and Moldova) favoured its development, Brasov being seen as "central place" (Iancu, 1971), place of

convergence of the main ways of communication, that were leading to the two Romanian Countries.

Nowadays, the quasi central position in the country, the proximity to the capital (distance between Bucharest and Brasov is of 161 km), also the railway and sea easy links to the capital represents a determinant for the development and attractiveness level of the city (this is well illustrated by the west eastern Romanian cities).

The city has been transformed over time, fact transposed also in the city's image in different periods. Initially, the town was recognised as craft and commercial centre, fact also attested by the humanist Johannes Honterus: "Brasov, commercial centre famous for its Turkish goods" (Oltean, 2010). In the XVth century there comes the first guilds (in 1420 is set up the furriers' guild, for which the Saint's Horse is built), and in 1798 there were 43 guilds already.

Starting with the second half of the XIXth century, once with the intensification of industrial activities, the city reaches an image predominant industrial, as P. Sălcudeanu mentions as well (1962): "The city of Brasov offers to the visitor the impressive image of a fabric forest, which stimulates the whole poetry of its natural landscape."

After the collapse of communist regime and starting with the economic and social changes that came together, the city gradually lost the image of industrial centre (because of the close down and demolition of most of the activity in those still functional). The transition from an industrial town image to a city tour image was made quite slowly, even if the benefits from the natural and cultural premises.

2. Materials and methods

In order to identify the representative image for the Brasov city, I conducted a survey of land. The instrument used was the questionnaire, which consists of 22 open and closed questions that aimed to assess residents' perception on Brasov city. The research was done in the period April-August 2011 on a sample of 110 individuals (the questionnaires were applied on-line, by posting on the website <https://spreadsheets.google.com>). There were questioned 68 females (62%) and 42 males (38%). Regarding the structure by age, this one is quasi uniform: 35% of the respondents are aged 18-25, 25% belong to the category 26-35 years old, 22% belong to the category 36-45 years old, 22% belong to the category 36-45 years old, 16% belong to the category 46-60 years old, the fewer people belong to the category "over 60 years old", respectively 7%. Most of the respondents are university graduated (48%) (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Sample structure

Ages (years)	Number	Level of education	Number
18 – 25	38	Elementary school	
26 – 35	23	Hight- school	8
36 – 45	24	University	53
16 – 60	18	Postgraduate	49
over 60	8		

3. Resultats and discutions

Every image is the result of a variety of different messages, sometimes contradictory, that the city transmits. The information is interpreted according to the values, beliefs and knowledge of each individual, who creates an "imaginary city, consisting of a multitude of

images and representations” (Kavaratus 2004 *apud* Hubbard, Hall, 1998). Point of interaction between objective town and city of mind is given by perception of the city, as each individual who meets it has.

One first question of the survey captures the gallery images instinctively associated to the city. According to Pylyshyn(2003), ”when you ask people to imagine something, they ask themselves what would they like to see and then they stimulate as much related aspects as possible as they can and find as relevant”. So most of the respondents (41%) have associated the Braş ov city image with the Tâmpa mountain. This can be attributed to the natural majesty and beauty (the mountain altitude is 960 m). 38% of the respondents mentioned the Square because of the beauty of the architectural assembly that consists in the buildings surrounding the market and the continuous, unitary, architectural front. There also have been mentioned the Black Church (34%), Poiana Braş ov (15%), famous winter sports resort but also district of Braş ov, Republic Street (14%), which connects the old town to the new one, the Şchei district (8%), one of the earliest centres of urban living in Braş ov, but also elements belonging to the natural environment (mountain-18%, nature-9% or related to the industrial activity of the town (7%) (Map 1).



Map 1: The gallery images instinctively associated to the city

If there is an element of the landscape that belongs to the general image of the city, the Black Church (70%) is considered to be the symbol of the town. The Church St. Maria (Black Church name was acquired after the fire of 1689) was built between 1383-1385 and it's ”the most representative monument of the Gothic art in our country” (Neacşu, 1968). Other possible symbols of Braş ov could be: First Romanian School (32%), built between 1827-1828 in order to facilitate communication of the habitants in Braş ov Şchei with the

ones in the city (Pop, 2010), Ecaterina Gate, one of the oldest gates of the town (1540) and the Promenade under the Tâmpa (16%) (figure 1.). Another symbol of the town is represented by the humanist Johannes Honterus (20%), the founder of Saxon gymnasium in Braşov (XVth century).

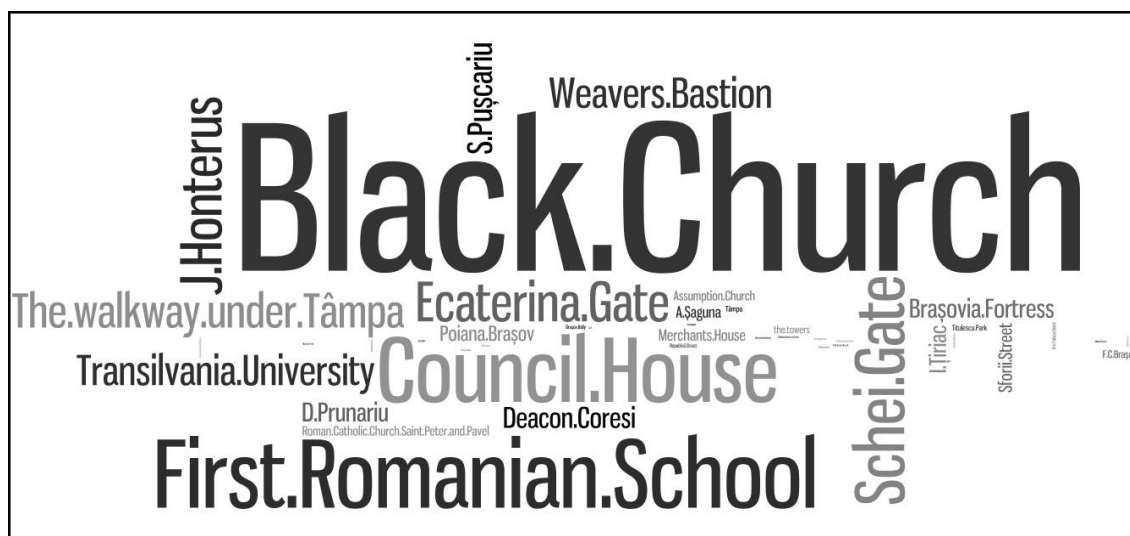


Figure 1: The possible symbols of Braşov city

There are several factors that contribute at the forming of Braşov brand image, and those factors can be grouped into several categories, according to responses obtained (figure 2). Thus, the most important element behind Braşov is the natural image (24%) or the buildings architecture (22%).

Although it has sufficient Attu to become (if it's not yet) a nice city, it has a composite image, sometimes contradictory, and most respondent residents' complaints are related to the economic situation of the city, too expensive services in relation to the quality offered, insufficient promotion of the cultural activities and the heritage tourism (table 2).

To build a positive image, the existence of a vast diversified natural and human heritage, well conserved and good quality is not enough, the degree of accessibility of the city being also very important. So, questions like: how do I get to that town? How long does it takes? These are questions that any potential visitor/investor ask himself before taking the next step to buying a vacation package, for a branch location or an event. 32% of the respondents think that Braşov has a good road access (it's easy to get in this city), taking into consideration the fact that it is served by three European roads-E60, E68 and E574 and seven national roads and there are daily road racings. In terms of railway accessibility, 32% of respondents agree that it's very good, the city has five stations that reach approximately 73 trains daily. A major problem experienced by 43% of participants in the survey refers to difficult air accessibility due to the lack of a local airport, the nearest airport is in Sibiu (at a distance of 142 km of Braşov).

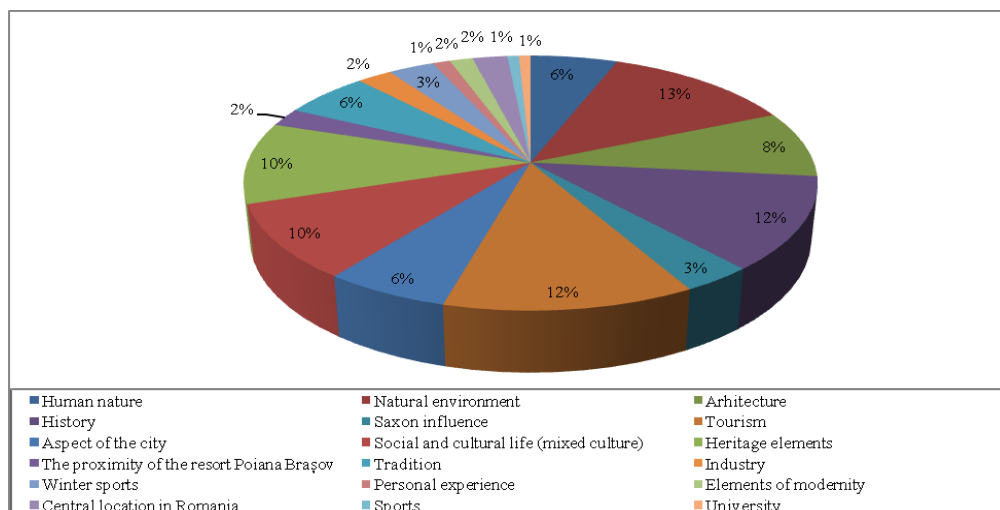


Figure 2: The main categories of elements underlying the image of Braşov city

Table 2: The composite image of Braşov city

Positive aspects	Negative aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - industrial city (57%); - clean city (85%); - cultural city (89%); - traditional city (93%); - touristic city (99%) – 251.188 tourists arrived in Braşov in 2010; - city safe for the tourists (99%); - city with quality services in tourism (84%); - city with an important tourism heritage (97%); - attractive city for the investors (88%) – it is important the investor's number (64%); - city with powerful local leaders (48%); - a city where people live well (61%); - aesthetic city (87%); - friendly and warm city (88%); - city economically dynamic (64%); - attractive university city (81%); - young city (92%), animated (67%); - city located in a pleasant region (99%) that has favourable climatic conditions (63%); - the city provides a modern accommodation infrastructure (81%); - the city provides a modern transport infrastructure (64%); - the current municipal team offers a positive image of the city (59%); - the mayor (G. Scripcaru, PDL) contributes to the good image of the city (67%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - city suffering from the changes made in the urban texture (60%); - too expensive tourist destination in relation to quality of service (41%); - cultural activities are insufficiently promoted (68%); - cultural heritage is insufficiently promoted (51%) and valued (50%); - taxes are high in relation to services (60%); - unemployment rate is high (55%)

Another aspect of the survey targeted the assessing of the residents' perception vis-à-vis to the importance of Braşov at microscale and macroscale. According to the perception

of respondents, Braşov is the most important city of Transylvania (93%) (figure 3), opinion categorized as easily self-centred, subjective if we refer to the economic, social and cultural situation of other Transylvanian cities (for example Cluj-Napoca). The respondents also consider that Braşov has a more European image rather (56%) than national (37%). The European image of the city can be attributed to the city's history (known as Kronstadt - in German, Brasso-Hungarian, Corona-Latin) and multiculturalism. History of the city excited the interest of researches (especially Hungarian and German) around the dispute about the initial colonization of Bârsa Country (Romanian settlements existed or not before the arrival of Teutonic Knights in 1211, as a result of Leopold's Diploma given by Hungarian King Andrei II).

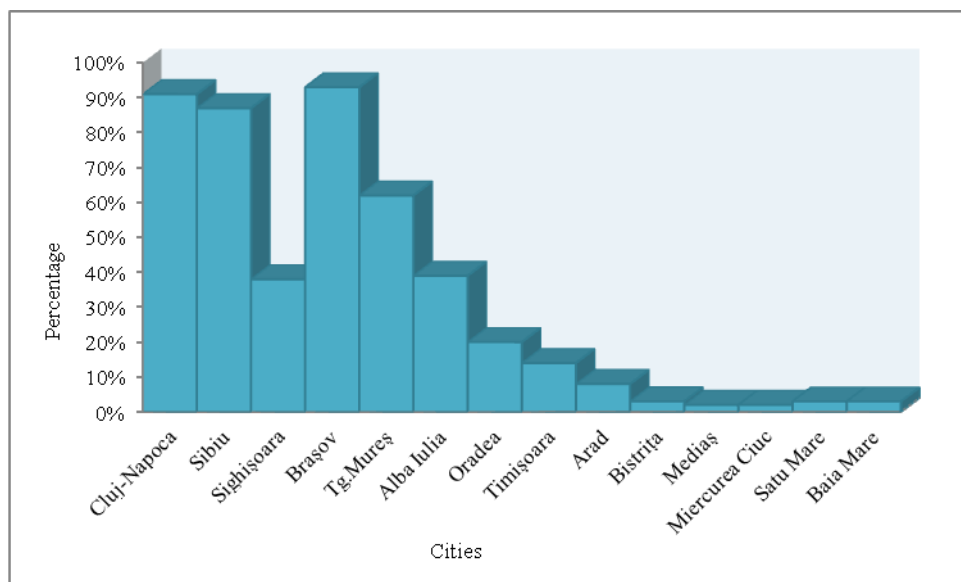


Figure 3: The most important cities of Transylvania, according to respondents

Even if Braşov is considered the most important Transylvanian city, it is not also considered the most important university centre. Thus, the most important university centre is Bucharest, followed by Cluj-Napoca (43%) and Iaşi (38%), Braşov is positioned on the 5th place (33%). Compared to the top of Romanian universities made in September 2011 by Research and Education Ministry, this ranking plays almost perfectly the real situation, with a slight difference in places five, six and seven (figure 4).

Among the cities competing Brasov is Sibiu (60%), thanks to its proximity and to the economic and cultural boom conferred by the title of European Capital of Culture in 2007, Cluj-Napoca (55%) because of the economic, social and cultural development, Iaşi (36%), Timişoara (35%) and Bucharest (25%) (figure 5).

To better promote the city, respondents believe that the authorities could rely on the organisation of major events (70%), city Days (51%), the increase in economic attractiveness (50%), the sustained activity of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (34%), and the existence of a well preserved heritage tourism (83%). Mainly responsible for promoting the city are City Hall (42%), Local Council (20%), national and international media (14%) and citizens of the city (11%).

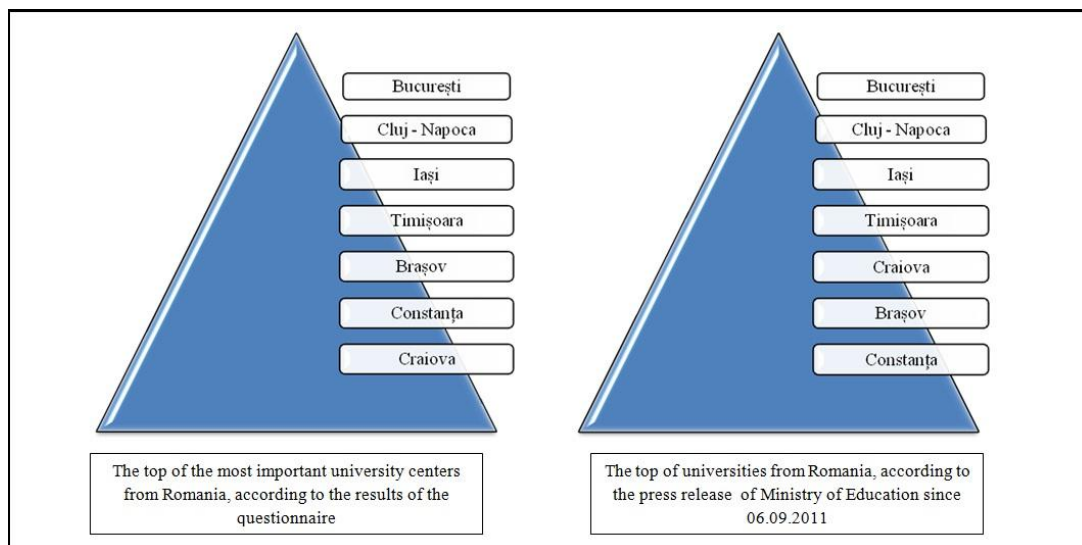


Figure 4: The top of the most important university centres from Romania

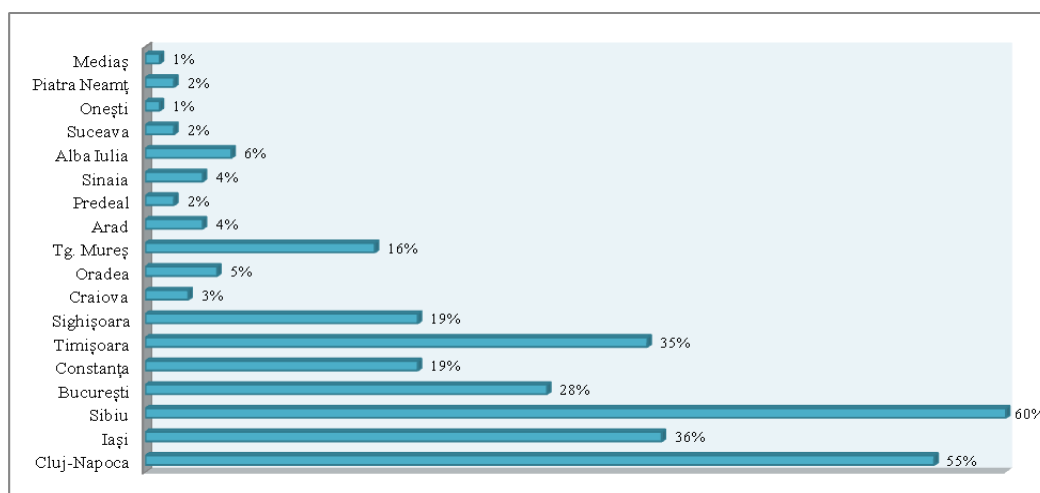


Figure 5: The cities considered to be competing Brașov city

If they would meet an European Union citizen and would be able to speak the same language, Brașov people would say about their city that is a mountain town with a great location and beautiful scenery (20%), a clean city (8%), with the objective worth visiting (29%), with a special architecture of buildings (8%), with a historic (medieval style) centre carefully restored (2%), with places loaded with history (13%), a beautiful city (25%), green

(8%), quiet (10%), multicultural (17%), tourism (16%) with various recreational opportunities (8%), a welcoming city with warm, friendly (11%), civilised (11%) people, a city with real opportunity for economic development (5%).

Concerning the elements that should be included, respectively, avoided in the city's publicity, respondents consider that should be included especially those elements related to the natural and the built environment, the traditions and customs preserved and the quality and diversity of services provided. Items classified as "to avoid" refer to the look of certain areas of the city (table 3).

Table 3: Elements that should be included/avoided in the city's publicity

To include	To avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of the building; • Elements of natural environment; • Panoramic images of the city; • Cultural and artistic events and sports; • Traditions and customs preserved; • The quality and diversity of the services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suburbs of the city; • Stray dogs ; • Fallen derelict industrial areas; • New part of town, built chaotic; • Not renovated buildingd or inadequate renovated, modern buildings; • Beggars; • Political propaganda and references to various politicians.

Asked about the elements that allow a city to have a positive brand, the participants mentioned: cleanliness of the city (32%), quality of infrastructure (29%), the character and quality of the people (26%), the city's used tourism potential (16%), quality of services (13%), developed economy (10%) and general appearance of the city (7%). Analysing these elements deemed necessary to build a positive image can say that Braşov city meets most criteria to become a place with a good image that can survive in a world where competition is becoming more and more aggressive.

Conclusions

Braşov city has a number of Attu (history, heritage, geographic location, people) that if they can exploit in the right direction it might become a lovemark. Although it still lacks a clear, coherent image, Braşov has potential to create a distinct image.

Braşov is perceived as an attraction place, a clean city that has a wide range of attractions (rich cultural heritage, relatively well preserved natural landscape particularly the location determined by the low mountain area) and recreational opportunities, with modern accommodation infrastructure and high quality service, but still expensive, a city where people live well but has a high unemployment rate. In this context, the authorities should emphasize and promote the Attu that the city has, but in the long term it is necessary to correct/solve weaknesses in order to avoid their amplification, and cancellation of the image city tends to form.

Even though Braşov has a real chance to relatively easy outline (through the efforts of public and private actors) a positive image, be kept in mind that a city's image is built over time and must be constantly updated, developed and streamlined.

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