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Romania as a country brand: A comparative study based on current nation brand indexes

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The purpose of this study is to provide a comparative analysis regarding the ranking of Romania as a country brand, based on the most widely used methods for measuring nation brands. The first part presents the different methodologies, variables and research designs used by four of these reputable country brand rankings, including the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index, the FutureBrand Country Brand Index, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report and the Good Country Index. The second part looks at the results of these indexes, comparing Romania's position to its previous rankings as well as to those of other nations from the Central and Eastern European region. The final part of the study formulates recommendations for governments and brand managers regarding the interpretation of these nation brand rankings.

Keywords: place branding, nation branding, nation brand equity, country brand index.

JEL codes: M38, Z32.

Introduction

While earlier marketing and branding techniques were used only for products and services, today it is widely accepted that some countries, regions and cities – alike manufacturers and suppliers – fight to be more efficient in reaching their target audiences and in building their own brands. Simon Anholt declared in 2002 that due to globalisation the whole world had become a huge department store (Fetscherin 2010). In order to remain competitive in this department store and to build a lasting brand, countries have started to use those tools and techniques that have already proved to be efficient in classical marketing.

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For public institutions acting as brand owners, one of the key concepts related to nation branding is the nation brand equity. Today, there are a number of measurement tools advanced by practitioners and academics in the field that provide an answer to the same question: how can and should the value of a nation brand be measured?

The present study examines the most widely used and acknowledged nation brand indexes, their methodology and recently published results and it evaluates the position of the Romanian nation brand in comparison to the results of earlier years and to the performances of other countries from the Central and Eastern European region. As earlier research (Kádár 2013) already examined the ranking of the Romanian nation brand, the current study can be considered relevant for two specific reasons: on the one hand, it points out the recent methodological differences related to these nation brand indexes, and on the other hand, it describes a new measurement tool which has recently been introduced for nation brands, namely the Good Country Index.

Literature review

Despite the fact that place branding has only recently emerged as an academic field, its application in practice has a long history. According to Hankinson (2010), the origins of the practice can be traced back to the mid-1800s. At that time, places adopted different marketing techniques in order to differentiate themselves. Earlier literature used the term 'place selling' to describe these marketing initiatives (Ward 1998). In that context, place selling was an act of communication, based on the specific offer a place could provide to its audience. It was a practice that focused mainly on external audiences, especially potential tourists and visitors.

The conceptual development of place branding as an academic field has multiple origins. The early academic interest came from scholars of urban policy, tourism, and marketing research. A thorough literature review on place branding theory is provided by Hankinson (2015), who explains the contribution of the above-mentioned fields. The field of urban policy examined the urban image of places and the

nature of place product. From the tourism perspective, the focus was placed on investigating the destination image as a phenomenon. Marketing literature provided research on the applicability of promotional tools and strategies in the context of places. These research fields evolved independently, with little reference to each other.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, there has been an emerging interdisciplinary convergence across these academic fields and, as a result, place branding has evolved into a distinct research domain for academic scholars. Place branding provides a theoretical foundation for branding strategies applied to destinations (destination branding), cities (city branding), regions (regional branding), and countries (nation branding). Compared to earlier 'place selling' initiatives, place branding – in its current view – refers to a more strategic approach involving the conscious planning and implementation of marketing and branding processes and strategies.

Current place branding literature still lacks a clear theoretical framework that should guide its practical application (Ashworth et al. 2015). There is still confusion in the use of terms such as place marketing or place branding. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) point out that there is no clear distinction between place marketing and place branding, as some scholars view branding as part of the tools that place marketing can offer to place marketers, whereas others argue that branding provides a framework and strategic guidance to place marketing. This study tends to agree with this latter view and considers place branding a process that has an overarching role in planning, creating, implementing and communicating the specific place identity of a certain city, region, or country.

Simon Anholt was the first scholar to use the term 'nation branding' in 1996 (Dinnie 2008). The concept was based on the idea that the reputation of a certain nation is similar to the image of a product or a company. Ten years later, the same author suggests (Anholt 2007) that the term 'competitive identity' should be used instead of nation branding because it better describes the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy, trade, investment, tourism, and export

promotion. Moreover, in his latest book, Anholt (2010) states that there is no such thing as nation branding because even if nations are already brands, they cannot be branded in the same way as companies do branding. A similar idea is advanced in the paper of Gudjonsson (2005), who argues that, despite its name, nation branding is not a process of branding a nation, but rather a supporting programme that increases the prosperity of a certain nation.

Other scholars, like Fan (2010), consider that the nation brand is the total sum of perceptions about a nation in the minds of international stakeholders, which exist even if no conscious efforts are made to manage them. The process of nation branding aims to develop and manage the brand identity of a certain country. Dinnie (2008) defines the concept as the unique and multi-dimensional combination of elements that provide the nation with a culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences. A more comprehensive definition is provided in the book of Aronczyk (2013), who points out that nation branding is the process of creating and communicating the national identity using corporate management tools, techniques, and expertise. From an economic point of view, it is a strategy for creating fiscal advantage in areas like tourism, foreign direct investment or higher education, whereas from a marketing perspective, it is more like a communication strategy that generates international awareness.

A current nation branding challenge is to create widely accepted and acknowledged models that can offer a basis for further research (Fan 2010). The majority of these models are trying to provide a theoretical framework for measuring the value of a certain place brand. In order to evaluate nation brand equity, several models have been created, like the Anholt-Gfk Roper Nation Brand Index, the Country RepTrak, the FutureBrand Country Brand Index, the East-West Nation Brand Perception Report, the Global Peace Index, the Good Country Index, or the Country Brand Strength Index (Fetscherin 2010; Go–Govers 2011; GoodCountry 2016a). The above-mentioned indexes provide information about the strength of a nation brand, but today several models are available for measuring the value of cities as place

brands as well, like the Anholt-GMI City Brand Index or the Saffron European City Brand Barometer (Zenker 2011). Sevin affirms that there are three possible options when considering the purpose of place branding measurement models: 1. employing corporate marketing and branding measures, 2. adapting corporate marketing and branding measures to the place branding context, or 3. designing models that are specific to the place branding field (Sevin 2014).

Research methodology

The current paper uses an exploratory qualitative approach. Secondary data is collected using online sources, primarily the websites of country brand indexes. The four indexes presented in this paper were selected considering four main factors. First, all of the four indexes are considered relevant and popular country brand measurement tools in the place branding literature. Second, the results and the methodology of these reports are publicly available. Third, all of the four reports are published annually or bi-annually. Fourth, all of the reports examined the performance of the Romanian nation brand over the last 10 years.

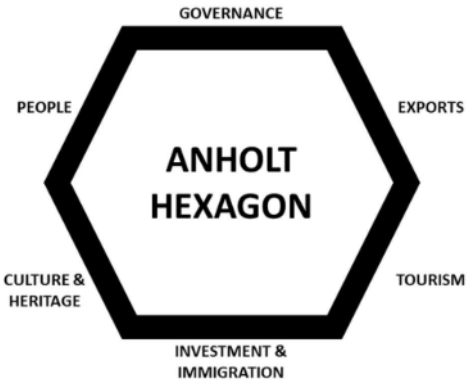
The case study uses Romania's brand as the unit of analysis. The aim of the study is to compare Romania's position in the selected nation brand indexes. The current paper takes into consideration the most recent position of the Romanian nation brand compared to the previous results and provides a comparison of the performances achieved by the Central and Eastern European countries.

Nation Brand Indexes

Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index

The index was developed by policy advisor Simon Anholt in 2005 (Feinberg–Zhao 2011). Since 2008, the ranking has been conducted in collaboration with GfK (Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung/Society for Consumer Research), the fourth largest market research organisation in the world. The Nation Brand Index (NBI) measures the image and reputation of 50 selected countries. The research is carried out in 20 core panel countries using online questionnaires. Each year, approximately

20 000 adults participate in the research. The theoretical framework of the research is based on the Anholt Nation Brand Hexagon (Anholt 2004). This framework examines the image and reputation of the countries based on six dimensions, as shown in Figure 1.



Source: Anholt (2004)

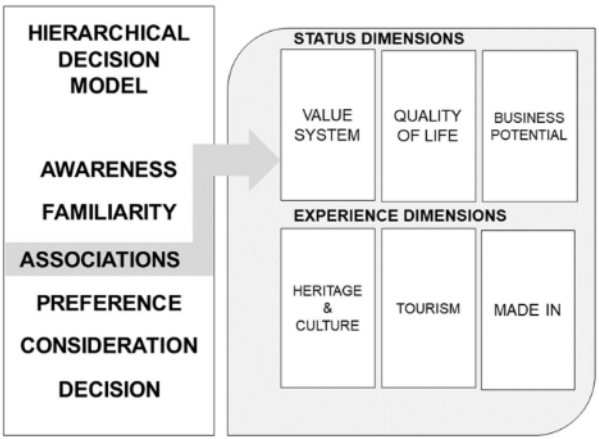
Figure 1. The Anholt Nation Brand Hexagon

The first dimension, *Governance*, refers to the public opinion about the competency of the national government, as well as its perceived commitment to global issues, like poverty, environment or international peace. The *People* dimension examines the reputation of the population for competence, openness, friendliness, and tolerance. The third dimension, *Culture & Heritage*, measures the global perception and appreciation of each country for its heritage and contemporary culture including arts, literature, movies, music, and sports. *Investment and Immigration* examine the power of attracting people to live, work or study in each country. The fifth dimension, *Tourism*, measures the tourism attractiveness of each country, considering the natural and man-made tourist attractions as well. Finally, the *Exports* dimension evaluates the image of the products and services from each country. The place branding literature refers to this phenomenon as the country-of-origin effect. The Anholt-GfK NBI is considered the most comprehensive and representative research of national reputation

(Feinberg-Zhao 2011). For governments and brand managers, this index offers valuable data about the global perception of a certain nation.

FutureBrand Country Brand Index

The global consultancy company FutureBrand developed a distinct measurement tool for nation brands and published the first Country Brand Index (CBI) report in 2005. The CBI is designed to measure the perceptions of a certain nation brand strength across multiple dimensions (Adams 2011). The latest report (2014–2015) included a total number of 75 countries, with research based on quantitative and qualitative data from 2500 respondents from 17 core panel countries. The selected respondents are considered opinion formers and frequent international business or leisure travellers (FutureBrand 2014a). Figure 2 presents the theoretical framework of the FutureBrand index, called the Hierarchical Decision Model (HDM).



Source: Future Brand (2014b. 9)

Figure 2. The FutureBrand Hierarchical Decision Model

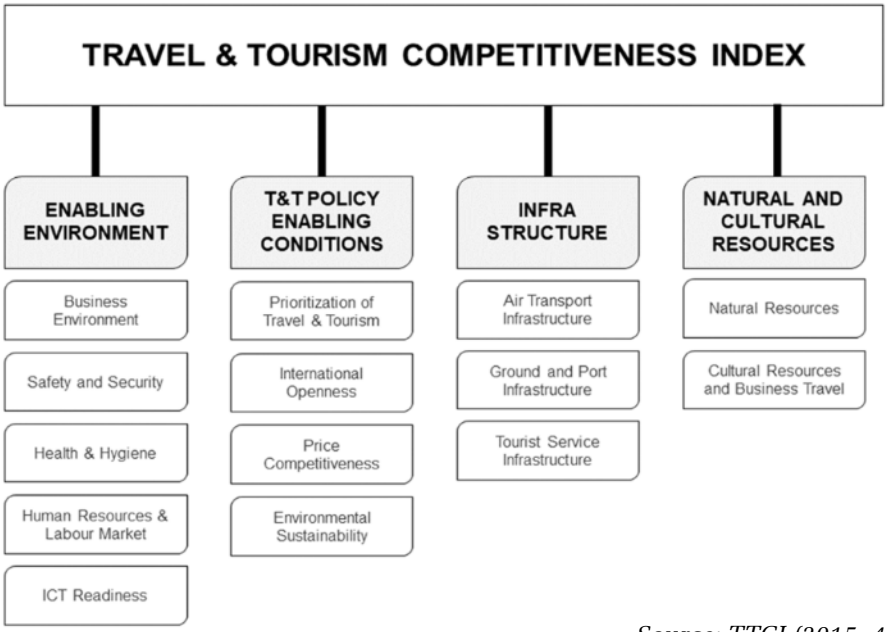
The HDM model determines how the key audiences perceive a nation brand. According to the model, there are six levels of brand perceptions: awareness, familiarity, associations, preference, consideration, and decision. The CBI measures the association dimensions for each country and divides them into two distinct categories: status-related associations

and experience-related associations. Status-related associations are divided into three sub-dimensions: value system, quality of life, and business potential. Experience-related associations include three sub-dimensions as well: culture and heritage, tourism, and made in effect. Compared to the NBI, there are several dimensions that are identical. Both indexes measure variables related to the tourism potential and attractiveness of the countries, both evaluate the quality of the products and services from a certain country, both examine the most important cultural and natural values, as well as the business potential and living standards. The FutureBrand Country Brand Index provides a valuable external view of country brand strengths and possible weaknesses that are otherwise not visible to brand managers and national governments (Adams 2011).

Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index

The World Economic Forum first published the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index report (TTCI) in 2007. The aim of the TTCI is to provide a comprehensive strategic tool for countries to measure those Travel & Tourism sector-related variables that contribute to the development and competitiveness of a certain country (TTCI 2015). The latest report ranked a total of 141 countries from all over the world. Two thirds of the data are statistical data from international organisations, while one third of the data is based on survey results from the annual Executive Opinion Survey carried out among 15 000 business executives and leaders.

The theoretical framework of the latest TTCI report is based on four sub-indexes as shown in Figure 3. The *Enabling Environment* sub-index evaluates some of the general settings that are necessary for the Travel & Tourism sector to operate, including the business environment, the safety and security of the country, health and hygiene conditions, human resources and labour market, and finally the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) readiness which measures not only the existence of a modern infrastructure, but also the capability of businesses to provide online services. The ICT sector has an increasing importance in Travel & Tourism competitiveness as more and more people use the Internet to plan and book their trips. The *Policy and Enabling Conditions* sub-index measures specific policies that have an



Source: TTCI (2015. 4)

Figure 3. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index Framework

impact on the Travel & Tourism industry like the extent to which the national government prioritises this industry sector through development projects and national marketing campaigns. Other variables include the international openness, the price competitiveness and the policies enhancing environmental sustainability.

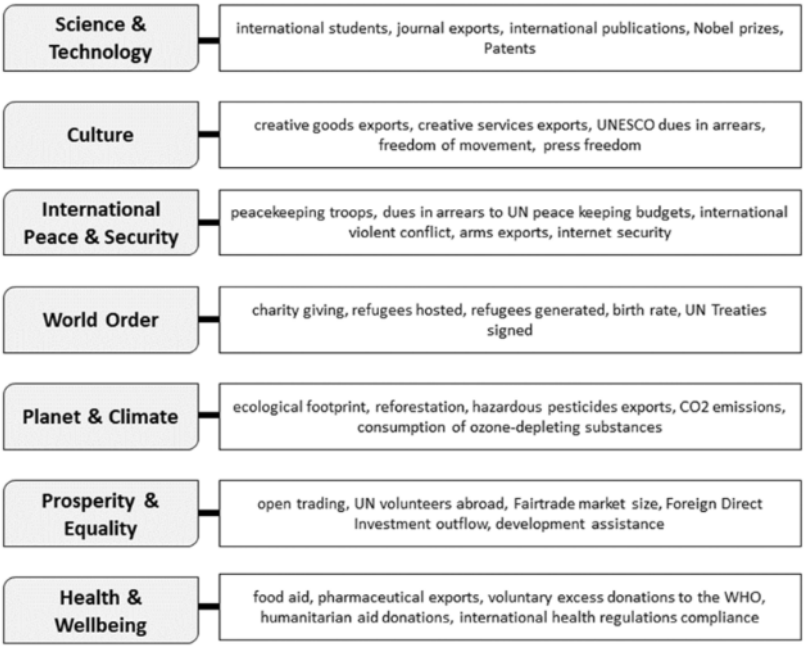
The *Infrastructure* sub-index captures the availability and quality of transport, including air, ground and port infrastructure, and tourist service infrastructure. The tourist service infrastructure measures indicators like the number of hotel rooms, car rental companies, or ATMs. The fourth sub-index, *Natural and Cultural Resources*, evaluates the reasons why people travel to a certain country, including natural, cultural and business-related values. The included variables measure the number of UNESCO World Heritage sites and tourism-related online search data across relevant keywords.

Good Country Index

The latest measurement tool for country brands is the Good Country Index (GCI) developed by Simon Anholt in collaboration with several organisations which provide data for the ranking. The first GCI report was published in 2014. The aim of the ranking is to measure what each country contributes to the common good of humanity, relative to its size (GoodCountry 2016a). According to Anholt, the main reason why people admire a country is that they feel it is a good country (Kortava 2015).

The latest GCI report ranked a total number of 163 countries according to 35 indicators, including positive indicators like humanitarian aid donations and the number of United Nations volunteers abroad as well as negative ones like CO_2 emissions and arms exports. Statistical data from the United Nations and other international organisations are used in order to rank the countries. The theoretical framework of the index includes seven main categories, with five subcategories each. The main categories are the following: Science & Technology, Culture, International Peace & Security, World Order, Planet & Climate, Prosperity & Equality, and Health & Wellbeing (Figure 4).

The *Science and Technology* dimension measures the contribution of each country based on variables like the number of international students, number of articles published in international journals or accumulated Nobel prizes. The *Culture* dimension evaluates variables like the creative goods and services exports based on the UNCTAD Creative Economy Report categorisation, the freedom of the press and the freedom of movement. The *International Peace and Security* dimension examines variables such as the number of peacekeeping troops in UN missions, the exports of weapons and ammunition, or the Global Cybersecurity Index score provided by the International Telecommunication Union. The contribution to *World Order* dimension includes variables like the number of refugees hosted and generated, the birth rate of the population, or the percentage of the population that gives to charity. The *Planet and Climate* dimension examines variables such as the ecological footprint of the countries, the CO_2 emissions, or



Source: author's own design based on GoodCountry (2016b)

Figure 4. The Good Country Index Framework

the consumption of ozone-depleting substances. The *Prosperity and Equality* dimension evaluates the number of UN volunteers abroad, the size of the fair trade market, as well as the FDI outflow. The last dimension measures the contribution of each country to the *Health and Wellbeing* of the planet based on variables like humanitarian aid donations, voluntary donations to the WHO (World Health Organisation), and the amount of food aid shipments.

Nation brand index rankings and the case of Romania

This part of the study examines the latest available results of the nation brand indexes presented above and compares the ranking of the Romanian country brand on the one hand to its previous results and on the other hand to those of other countries from the Central and Eastern

European region. The countries from the region are selected based on the OECD statistics portal: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (OECD 2016).

The latest report published by the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index refers to 2016 (GfK 2016) and the following 10 countries top the ranking (their 2015 position is mentioned in brackets): 1. United States of America (1), 2. Germany (2), 3. United Kingdom (3), 4. Canada (5), 5. France (4), 6. Italy (7), 7. Japan (6), 8. Switzerland (8), 9. Australia (9), and 10. Spain (10). As far as the top ten countries are concerned, we notice that most of these countries have maintained their 2015 position and no new country has made it to the top ten. Although there are no major differences regarding rankings, we notice some differences between the scores reached by the countries. When examining these differences, we can talk about minor changes (+/- 0.25–0.50), medium changes (+/- 0.51–1.00), and major changes, when the difference is greater than 1.00 point. The latest report shows that the reputation of each top 10 country has changed in a negative manner compared to the previous ranking. Two countries have witnessed large declines in their reputation, namely the United Kingdom (-1.31) and the United States of America (-1.04). In the case of Germany (-0.96), Japan (-0.88), France (-0.81), Switzerland (-0.64), Sweden (-0.64), and Italy (-0.54) medium declines have occurred. Only two countries from the top 10 nations, namely Canada (-0.33) and Australia (-0.25) have witnessed minor declines in their reputation (PlaceBrandObserver 2016).

The 2016 Anholt-GfK report ranked six countries from the Central and Eastern European region: Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Turkey, and Kazakhstan (GfK 2016). It is the first time that the latter – Kazakhstan – is included on the list. As public data is available only for the top 10 countries in the ranking, it is not possible to compare the actual results of the countries from the Central and Eastern European region. The last time Romania was among the 50 analysed countries was in 2009. That year, Romania reached the 37th place, which means that 75% of the analysed countries had better results. In

2009, the Central and Eastern European region was represented by the following countries: Russia (21), Poland (27), Hungary (29), the Czech Republic (30), Turkey (32), Estonia (42), and Lithuania (43). We notice that five of these countries show up in the most recent report as well. From the list of Central and Eastern European countries, the Anholt-GfK Nation Brand Index does not measure the country image of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Romania, Estonia, and Lithuania. The fact that Romania has not been included in the report since 2009 indicates that – on a regional level – it does not meet the requirements of the model, i.e. people think that this country brand is not determinant and relevant enough to be part of the analysis.

The latest FutureBrand Country Brand Index report is the 2014–2015 edition. The top 10 country brands according to this latest report are the following (FutureBrand 2014a): 1. Japan (3), 2. Switzerland (1), 3. Germany (7), 4. Sweden (4), 5. Canada (2), 6. Norway (10), 7. the United States of America (8), 8. Australia (6), 9. Denmark (12), 10. Austria (17). Similar to the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index, there are only a few changes regarding the top 10 countries compared to the previous report. Denmark and Austria are the two exceptions. Japan took the number one position for the first time in the history of the report. The result is probably related to the latest developments in the research methodology. FutureBrand's report measured attributes relating to the country-of-origin effect for the first time as an additional dimension of country brand strength and increased the focus on specific measures like the decisions to visit, invest in and recommend a certain country. The latest FutureBrand report also emphasised that, out of the 75 countries included in the survey, only 22 qualified as a country brand. In other words, less than 30% of the countries had above-average perception scores across all six dimensions: value system, quality of life, business potential, culture and heritage, tourism, and country-of-origin (FutureBrand 2014b).

FutureBrand CBI reports first mentioned Romania in 2008 (FutureBrand 2008). At that time, the country did not reach a certain position, but it was mentioned in the so-called 'In Vogue' category,

which meant that the country had got the attention of a certain target group and that could lead to positive word-of-mouth advocacy for the country. The first public survey including the ranking list of all the analysed countries refers to the year 2010. At that time, 110 countries were analysed and Romania ranked 92nd (FutureBrand 2010. 45). In the 2011-2012 survey, 113 countries were analysed and Romania took the 101st place (FutureBrand 2011. 79), whereas in 2012–2013 it ranked 100th out of 118 analysed countries (FutureBrand 2012. 106). The latest report ranked only 75 countries. Romania was still among the countries participating in the survey and took the 62nd place, overtaking countries like Colombia (63), Vietnam (64) or Kenya (65), but finishing behind Lebanon (61), Sri Lanka (60) or Slovakia (59). As far as the European countries are concerned, the report emphasises that they usually receive really good scores for tourist attractions, natural values, historical sites, built heritage, culture, and arts; but, at the same time, they usually get worse scores for technological development, business potential, gastronomy and good price-value ratio. Analysing the Central and Eastern European region, Romania reached a better position than the neighbouring Bulgaria (67), but it was overtaken by Slovakia (59), Hungary (56), Estonia (47), Poland (45), Croatia (44), and the Czech Republic (29). The most outstanding country in the region seems to be the Czech Republic, which made it to the top 30. The following countries from the Central and Eastern European region were not included in the report: Albania, Slovenia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The latest Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report was published in 2015. According to this latest report, the top 10 ranked countries were the following (TTCI 2015): 1. Spain (5.31), 2. France (5.24), 3. Germany (5.22), 4. United States of America (5.12), 5. United Kingdom (5.12), 6. Switzerland (4.99), 7. Australia (4.98), 8. Italy (4.98), 9. Japan (4.94), and 10. Canada (4.92). Just like in the case of the Anholt-GfK and FutureBrand rankings, the TTCI ranking emphasises the dominance of European countries as six out of the first 10 positions are taken by countries from this continent. The report points out that Europe continues to dominate the ranking thanks to its outstanding tourism service infrastructure,

excellent health and hygiene conditions, and the high degree of international openness and integration, mostly thanks to its Schengen Area, but it also highlights that there are significant differences across countries and regions (TTCI 2015). Spain tops the list for the first time, followed by France and Germany. The fact that Spain is not listed as a top 10 country in the previously presented rankings shows that the TTCI ranking prioritises those countries that have greater tourist potential and successfully manage to benefit from it. The annually published Tourism report of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) supports this assumption. In 2015, the first three countries ranked by the number of international tourist arrivals were the following: 1. France (84.5 million tourist arrivals), 2. United States of America (77.5 million tourist arrivals), and 3. Spain (68.2 million tourist arrivals) (UNWTO 2016).

Since 2007, the TTCI report has examined the competitiveness of the Romanian tourism industry as well. Table 1 sums up the results of this report, presenting the position obtained in the ranking, the achieved score and the total number of countries examined in the survey. In 2007, Romania reached the 76th position out of 124 countries (TTCI 2007. 16). One year later, it made it to the top 70 and since then it has managed to keep a top 70 position. Out of these six reports, Romania managed to obtain its best result in 2011, when it ranked 63rd out of 139 countries, with a score of 4.17 (TTCI 2011). The most significant leap in the ranking of Romania occurred between 2007 and 2008, while the most significant drop happened from 2011 to 2013, when the country lost five positions (TTCI 2013). Regarding the obtained scores, the country got the lowest score in the latest survey (3.78), while the highest score (4.17) was registered in 2011.

In the latest report, Romania managed to overtake only one country from the Central and Eastern European region, namely Albania which finished in the 106th place. All the other countries from the region managed to take higher positions in the ranking. The results highlight significant differences inside the region. Besides Albania and Romania, three other countries from the region did not manage to reach a top 50 place in the ranking, namely Slovakia (61), Lithuania (59), and Latvia

Table 1. Ranking of Romania in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report between 2007 and 2015

TTCI report year	RO place	RO score	No. of countries
2007	76	3.91	124
2008	69	3.88	130
2009	66	4.04	133
2011	63	4.17	139
2013	68	4.04	140
2015	66	3.78	141

Source: author's own design based on TTCI reports

(53). Three countries ranked between 40 and 50: Bulgaria (49), Poland (47) and Hungary (41), while the remaining four nations from the region managed to rank among the top 40 countries: Slovenia (39), Estonia (38), the Czech Republic (37), and Croatia (33).

The first edition of the Good Country Index report was published in 2014 and because of the different research approach, the ranking showed significantly different results. The top 10 countries were the following (GoodCountry 2016c): 1. Ireland, 2. Finland, 3. Switzerland, 4. The Netherlands, 5. New Zealand, 6. Sweden, 7. United Kingdom, 8. Norway, 9. Denmark, and 10. Belgium. The second and latest edition so far produced several changes, with four new countries in the top 10 positions (GoodCountry 2016c): 1. Sweden (6), 2. Denmark (9), 3. The Netherlands (4), 4. United Kingdom (7), 5. Switzerland (3), 6. Germany (13), 7. Finland (2), 8. France (11), 9. Austria (14), and 10. Canada (12). The GCI ranking shows the most prominent dominance of European countries, Canada being the only non-European country in the top 10 list.

Romania reached a middle position in the first survey, finishing in the 65th place out of 125 analysed countries. Compared to this result, in 2015 the country witnessed significant improvement and took the 36th place. The detailed results highlight the dimensions where Romania achieved higher scores compared to the majority of the countries investigated in the survey, like Culture (27th place), Planet and Climate (28th place), and International Peace and Security (29th place). The dimensions where the country needs to improve in the future are the

ones related to Science and Technology (51st place), Health and Wellbeing (80th place), and Prosperity and Equality (138th place).

The 2015 GCI report examines all the eleven nations from the Central and Eastern European region. Just like with the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness report, Albania is the region's outsider country. With the exception of Albania (109th place), all the other countries from the region rank among the first 50 nations. Romania (36th place) overtakes Lithuania (45th place), Latvia (41st place), Croatia (40th place) and Estonia (38th place) and finishes just one position before Slovakia (37th place). The Czech Republic ranks 35th and four countries from the region take a place in the top 30 countries: Bulgaria (29th place), Slovenia (28th place), Poland (25th place), and Hungary (24th place).

Table 2. Country brand indexes and Romania's position

Index	**Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index**	**FutureBrand Country Brand Index**	**Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index**	**Good Country Index**
Author	Simon Anholt	FutureBrand Agency	World Economic Forum	Simon Anholt and Frank Govers
Method and source of data	Survey conducted among 20,000 people from 20 core panel countries	Statistical data and survey conducted among 2500 opinion formers from 17 panel countries	Statistical data from international organisations and results from the global public opinion poll	Statistical data from international organisations corrected for the economic size of the country
Dimensions	Governance, People, Culture & Heritage, Investment & Immigration, Tourism, Exports	Value System, Quality of Life, Business Potential, Heritage & Culture, Tourism, Made in	Enabling Environment, T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions, Infrastructure, Natural and Cultural Resources	Science & Technology, Culture, International Peace & Security, World Order, Planet & Climate, Prosperity & Equality, Health & Wellbeing
First published	2005	2005	2007	2014
Total of countries[2]	50	75	141	163
RO Position[3]	37 (2009)	62 (2014)	66 (2015)	36 (2015)

Source: author's own design

Table 2 summarises the country brand indexes presented in the current study, emphasising the authors behind the models, the source of the rankings, the dimensions that are taken into consideration, the year of publication, the number of countries being examined in the latest available report, as well as Romania's position in the latest rankings.

Conclusions and final thoughts

The current study has presented the most important country brand indexes and examined Romania's position in these rankings, comparing the results to its previous performances and to its direct competitors from the Central and Eastern European region. Country brand indexes are considered important measurement tools that can provide valuable information to governments and branding consultants about the effectiveness of their place branding activities. These indexes offer comparable data, so brand managers can get an idea about how well the country manages to keep up with the competition.

As presented in this paper, the source information and the research methodology differ from one index to another, so it is hard to compare them, even if there are some similarities in the dimensions taken into consideration when defining the final rankings. All four indexes examine the cultural resources of the countries, with tourism being another key factor for country brands as well as the products and services that are exported. The Anholt-GfK and the FutureBrand indexes emphasise the importance of exported goods and services. The major differences are related to the source of information. The Anholt-GfK report considers the opinion of 20 000 people from selected panel countries in order to define the list of most valuable country brands. The FutureBrand index and the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness report base their ranking on statistical data and on public opinion surveys. The Good Country Index uses only statistical data provided by international organisations.

Romania outperforms 78% of the investigated nations in the Good Country Index. The report considers that the country contributes effectively to the common good of humanity relative to its economic

size. The latest Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report shows that Romania overtakes 53% of the analysed countries. Based on the results of this report, the country has an above-average tourist potential but some areas, like business environment and infrastructure, need to be improved in order to benefit from this potential. In the latest FutureBrand report, Romania ranks at the bottom of the list, outperforming only 17% of its competitors. The FutureBrand result and the fact that since 2009 the country has not been included among the 50 nations selected for the Anholt-GfK report suggest that Romania is still struggling to build a competitive country image. Earlier initiatives failed or became involved in a scandal, so not only did they not reach the expected effect, but they have negatively influenced the evaluation of the country and its image (Kádár 2013. 20).

Based on earlier nation branding experiences partly supported by place branding literature, a list of recommendations is available, considering the aspects brand managers and government institutions should pay attention to before starting branding activities in order to achieve the expected results.

Long-term thinking: Regarding nation branding, it is important to underline that successful branding is always the result of a well-planned, elaborated and efficiently implemented strategy (Dinnie 2016). It is very important for the leaders of the countries to recognize that brand building or successful brand repositioning is always the result of a conscious and long-term process. Activities, like designing a new logo or launching a new promotional campaign, are important pieces of the whole process, but without a well-planned strategy, these activities fail to build a stable country brand.

Leaving political interests behind: In developing and politically less stable countries, a common problem is that branding initiatives cannot ignore political interests. Therefore, it often happens that developing tendencies specified by previous governments are completely changed by the current government, so the process has to start again from the beginning. In the long run, this hinders the building of a stable and consolidated nation brand.

Responsible branding: In the process of place branding, the country' s citizens, not governments will be the brand owners. It is the governments' mission to initiate the process and to provide the necessary resources for place branding activities. As opposed to classical branding processes, place branding involves a higher responsibility because, in most of the cases, the taxes paid by citizens represent the main resources for these activities.

Repositioning of the spontaneous image: It is important for governments to recognize that their own country already has an image, independently of whether the government has previously tried to build an image or not. A country's image is often created based on some stereotypes and not on personal experiences. This influences the image of the country, of its citizens, or of its products. Earlier research (Russel–Russel 2010) has emphasised that one of the biggest challenges for the emerging countries that try to position themselves on international markets is to overcome these prejudices. Because of this spontaneous image, the place branding process focuses on the rebranding of a certain place.

More than destination branding: For the majority of political leaders, place branding represents the activity through which a certain place tries to promote its image in the most effective manner in order to generate more visitors. Place branding literature calls this process destination branding. Political leaders should never forget that the place branding process is addressed to a wider target group. Branding literature suggests that there are at least six major target groups: 1. inhabitants, 2. public institutions, 3. the media, 4. tourists, 5. investors, and 6. non-governmental organisations (Kádár 2014. 63). In the process of place branding, it is vital to analyse what citizens think about their place, how comfortable they find the living conditions offered by that place and how proud they are of their place, country, and nation. All these are just as important as attracting external capital or potential tourists.

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