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STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR THE BUCHAREST STRATEGY AND CITY BRAND

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Abstract

On the international stage, public administration has become an essential factor, capable of providing a nation with the competitive advantage. Improving standards in local administration in our country has included not only a vigorous and sustained process of reform, but also a drive to modernise and perfect management within the public sector. These aspects are essential, since decisions made by partners and investors are to an ever larger extent influenced by the quality, efficiency and credibility of public administration. Following these considerations, and based upon an empirical research conducted with the aid of a survey and a comparative analysis between the manner in which the branding and development strategies were developed in Vancouver and Bucharest, the present paper aims to identify the main strategic directions and branding elements necessary in elaborating a strategy and in accumulating a dossier of best practices, in order to implement successfully the strategic planning process and the branding strategy in the local communities of Romania.

Keywords: local public administration; strategy; strategic planning; strategic management; quality public services; branding strategy; city brand.

JEL Classification: H70, M31.

Introduction

In the current context, marked by the permanent reform and modernisation of the Romanian state, the development of public administration at the local level must be based on the criteria of efficiency, performance, competitiveness and quality. These must be instrumental in transforming local communities into instruments generating the highest degree of satisfaction for residents, providing high quality public services, excellent living standards, security and confidence.

All these aspects encourage a new approach to public sector management, consisting of the intensive development of processes such as strategic planning and branding strategy for local communities in Romania, which may be based upon the models provided by states

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and cities from the United States and Canada, which have applied strategic planning and branding strategies with notable success: Vancouver, Texas, Minnesota, Oregon, Seattle.

Based upon these models, the current paper aims to deliver the following:

- **Identify a new approach to public sector management**, which consists of the intensive development of the processes of strategic planning and branding strategy across local communities in Romania;
- **Identify the main axes of strategic development for the City of Bucharest**, which will form the foundation upon which to build the strategy for the development of this city;
- **Identify the branding elements of the City of Bucharest**, which will form the basis for the creation of a branding strategy for the city.

1. Methodology

With regard to the research methodology, the paper relies on an *empirical investigation* conducted using the following research instruments:

- *A comparative analysis* of the manner in which the development strategies were elaborated in Vancouver and Bucharest;
- *A survey*, modelled on that used by the local authorities in Vancouver, aimed at fine tuning the development strategy for the city.

Aiming to “*Identify the optimum development directions for Bucharest*”, the questionnaire was adapted to the particular conditions prevalent in Bucharest and includes the following data categories, which have been analysed and interpreted:

- *The general direction followed in the city’s evolution and development;*
- *The main challenges facing the city in the following 5 years: living standards, social responsibility, economic development, community involvement and basic public services;*
- *Priorities and strategic investments: the overhead highway;*
- *Branding strategy;*
- *Socio-demographic data.*

The questionnaire was aimed at two main target groups:

- On the one hand, *members of the General Council of the City of Bucharest and members of the executive wing*, directors within the Bucharest City Council, representing the political and decision-making powerhouse of the Bucharest public administration. In the case of the Councilmen and directors within the Bucharest City Council, the face-to-face interviewing method was used, totalling 50 Councilmen and 10 Executive Directors.
- On the other hand, a sample of the general public, represented by 600 residents of Bucharest. In this case, the interviews were conducted on a sample of 600 citizens, using the CATI method of sociological research.

The article aims to identify the main strategic directions and the elements of branding strategy necessary in elaborating a development strategy and a city brand for Bucharest.

Moreover, it aims to identify a series of key elements or best practices to ensure the successful implementation of strategic planning, strategic management and branding strategies for local communities in Romania.

2. Strategic planning and branding strategy – essential instruments for the development of local communities across Romania

Conceptual definitions of strategic planning and management within the public sector

According with Richard D. Young monograph (2003, p. 7), definitions of strategic planning vary, but gravitate around many common elements. A survey of these definitions reveals some of these common factors, such as:

- **Vision** – articulating a common ‘vision for the future’ or at least a conceptualisation of a point where the organisation sees itself in the long run;
- **Evaluation** – determining the position in which the organisation finds itself at a given moment;
- **Strategies** – identifying the manner in which an organisation will meet in practical terms its goals and objectives;
- **Measurement** – evaluating the progress achieved by the organisation in implementing its action plans.

Given the existence of these common factors, an analysis of the document published by the Ways and Means Committee (WMC) represents an excellent starting point in defining and understanding strategic planning. The WMC document offers two definitions:

- The first presents strategic planning as a long-term process of evaluation and analysis, aimed towards the future, which involves establishing goals and, more importantly, making decisions; a ‘diagram’ which defines the path to follow between the current situation and the vision for the future; a mechanism for planning which is based to a large extent on the capabilities of the organisation and takes into account the changes in general context (*ibid.*, p. 6).
- The second definition is based on Drucker (1993): the continuous process of entrepreneurial decision-making, done methodically and with maximal knowledge of future conditions; the logical organisation of the efforts to implement these decisions; and the evaluation of the results produced by these decisions by comparing them to the desired outcome, through the method of feed-back (*ibid.*).

Boulter (1997) defines strategic planning in a similar fashion, as the „procedure whereby a long-term mechanism, oriented towards the implementation of politics connecting the present with a clearer vision of the future is being established” (p. 6). Boulter adds that strategic planning „includes an evaluation of the performance and of the successes obtained by the agency, using a multi-annual perspective” (*ibid.*).

Another definition may be found in Bryan Barry’s book, “Strategic Planning Workbook for Non-profit Organizations” (1997). He states that strategic planning is “that which an organisation aims to achieve and, secondly, the manner in which decision-makers within the organisation direct or utilise its resources to meet their objectives” (p. 5).

Streib and Poister (2002), in an article describing the manner in which strategic planning has been used by city administrations across the USA, state that local officials have begun to take strategic planning seriously only as late as the 1980s. This was a response to the economic policy of the Reagan administration, which entailed draconic cuts in federal funds directed to city councils. With regards to definitions, Streib and Poister (p. 18) state that strategic planning is a fairly simple and necessary activity, an effort to plan or a method to “concentrate limited resources, maximise efforts and exploit opportunities”. They continue by stating that strategic planning is that activity which: “attempts to revitalise an organisation by channelling its efforts towards its most important goals and activities” (*ibid.*).

Finally, Bryson (1995) defines strategic planning in complete fashion, also adding a political nuance. He claims that strategic planning is an excellent method for a governmental organisation to neutralise a set of fluctuating situations and circumstances. Bryson argues that the main purpose of strategic planning is strategic thinking and strategic action. Moreover, strategic planning is necessarily connected to political realities. Bryson believes that strategic planning “accepts that nature of decision-making in the political world and develops the necessary actions” (p. 20). In the act of governing, many of the decisions made with regard to determining missions and goals for agencies, but also with regard to budgets and monetary allocations are political decisions.

John Bryson’s strategic model, recommended in his 1995 book, *Strategic Planning for Public and Non-profit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, is methodical, participative, conventional and particularly well adapted for public organisations (R. D. Young, 2003, p. 28). and according to him, the process involves ten stages: 1) *Initiating and achieving agreement on a process of strategic planning*; 2) *Identifying organisational mandates*; 3) *Clarifying the mission and common organisational values*; 4) *Performing a SWOT analysis (evaluating the internal and external environment in order to identify strong and weak points, opportunities and threats)*; 5) *Identifying strategic problems facing the organisation, which may influence the process of strategic planning*; 6) *Formulating strategies to manage and solve the problems facing the organisation*; 7) *Revising and adapting the strategic plan*; 8) *Determining an efficient and adequate vision for the organisation*; 9) *Developing an efficient implementation process*; 10) *Final re-evaluation of the strategic plan and of the process of strategic planning* (1995, p. 23).

Conceptual definitions of branding strategies in the public sector

Special mention must be made of the book *Information communication technologies and city marketing: digital opportunities for cities around the world* by Mila Gasco-Hernandez and Teresa Torres-Coronas (2009). They have noticed that over the past few years, cities have been forced to compete against each other, as a result of the global transformations which have had a fairly great impact on local organisations. Cities must attract tourists, enterprises, skilled people, and must identify markets for the products they export. This forces cities to adopt the instruments of strategic management of marketing and to create a solid brand for themselves. As a consequence, several methods of urban marketing and a number of approaches and instruments have been designed to draw attention to some of the city’s most interesting sections. In spite of all this, and despite the heavy investment in this

area over the past few years, there is still a very important instrument brought about by the new age which has yet to be exploited to its full potential, namely the internet. "In a global world, people (employees, clients, partners and competitors) are connected through open networks (e.g. the internet) and management must take this aspect into consideration" (Plumb & Zamfir, 2011, p. 127).

Mila Gasco-Hernandez & Teresa Torres-Coronas' work also presents the modification of the marketing mix when one deals with urban marketing and adapt the traditional model of market placing of the four 'P's:

- *Product*, which deals with the production system, produced goods (or the image of the city), ingredients (such as the character of the city, economic activities, natural environment, services, entertainment, culture and tourism), and the distinctive features of the city (those characteristics which might give the community a competitive advantage).
- *Price*, which refers to the utilisation value of the terrain dedicated to residential areas or the utilisation value for the creation of a new business.
- *Placing* refers to the network of relations with partners (both internal and external) which is being developed by the city in order to apply its image on potentially targeted markets or aiding in the penetration of new markets.
- *Promotion*, which includes advertisement, PR, campaigns, strategies or city logos.

To these four components of the marketing mix, the authors add *people*, a term used to acknowledge the process of human resource management, to attract new residents and visitors to the city and contribute to city development. Although the above remain valid, new instruments are becoming available for city managers. Of these, authors emphasize the internet and the new strategies in urban marketing which will change the way in which cities are being managed.

Returning to people, Mark Batey, in his *Brand meaning* (2008) analyses the meaning a brand has for its consumers and this must become the guide in developing a branding strategy. The preference shown by a consumer to a particular brand depends, without exception, on what that brand means to the consumer.

Finally, one might say that branding represents the optimal starting point for urban marketing and a solid framework with the aid of which to articulate the management of the urban image (Popescu & Corboş, 2011, p.44), but one must not omit to acknowledge that "constructing a brand is a difficult, complex, and sensitive process" (Nistorescu & Barbu, 2008, p. 12).

3. Identifying the optimal development directions for Bucharest. Comparative analysis with Strategic Plan Survey Vancouver

In order to identify the "*Optimal development direction for Bucharest*" and to be able to conduct a comparative analysis between the branding and development strategies of Vancouver and Bucharest, the authors have created a questionnaire, modelled on that produced by the authorities of Vancouver. A pilot study has been conducted, in order to verify and calibrate the questionnaire to the realities of the Romanian local administration.

The questionnaire was then presented to members of the General Council of the City of Bucharest and to members of the executive wing, directors from the Bucharest City

Council, on the one hand, and a sample of 600 residents aged 18 and over, on the other hand.

In the case of the questionnaire presented to the 600 residents, the CATI method was used. In the case of the questionnaire presented to the 50 Councilmen and 10 directors from the City Council, the face-to-face interviewing method was applied. By comparison, the Vancouver face-to-face interview sample included 112 people, among them City Council employees.

The telephone interview was conducted with an equal number of people both in Vancouver and in Bucharest, the sample including 600 people. The sample was stratified, with randomly selected residences and random selection of interviewees aged 18 and over, having permanent resident status in Vancouver and Bucharest, respectively.

In the case of the Bucharest research, the sample has been balanced to match the known values for the sex and age distribution among the population. The standard margin of error is 2.65% at a level of confidence of 95%. The research was conducted between the 7th and the 13th of May 2012. The research conducted by Intercept Research Corporation on behalf of the Vancouver City Council took place between the 20th of April and the 3rd of May 2007; the margin of error was 4%.

The questionnaire was adapted to meet the requirements and specificities of Bucharest and includes the following categories which have been analysed and interpreted:

A. The general direction for the evolution and development of the city

At the question “In your opinion, is your city heading in the right direction?”, 65.1% of Bucharest residents respond affirmatively, while in the case of Vancouver, only 52.7% did so. In the case of the members of the administration, the situation is reversed: the degree of optimism in Bucharest drops to 58.9%, while the majority of Vancouver officials (63.6%) consider that things are heading in the right direction.

Table no. 1: In your opinion, is your city heading in the right direction?

%	POPULATION			ADMINISTRATORS		
	YES	NO	N/A	YES	NO	N/A
Bucharest	65.1	31.9	3	58.9	30.7	10.4
Vancouver	52.7	24.3	23	63.6	15	21.4

With regard to the most important problems that Bucharest and Vancouver will face in the following five years, the study shows that the inhabitants of Bucharest consider the following to be the most pressing: lack of cleanliness (15.17%), stray dogs (14.99%), traffic (8.59%), urban sprawl (5.12%), and infrastructure (4.39%). Meanwhile, Vancouver residents have listed: traffic congestion/control/transportation planning 20%, Growth/manage/plan for/limit/provide adequate infrastructure/stop sprawl 17%, I-5 commute/travel between Portland and Vancouver/bridge improvements/additions 12%, Mass transit/more/improve/add light rail/more buses 7%, maintain/repair/improve roads/streets 5%.

From the perspective of administrators, problems are structured thus: traffic 16.67%, pollution 14.10%, infrastructure 8.97%, lack of parking spaces 5.13%, sprawl 3.85%.

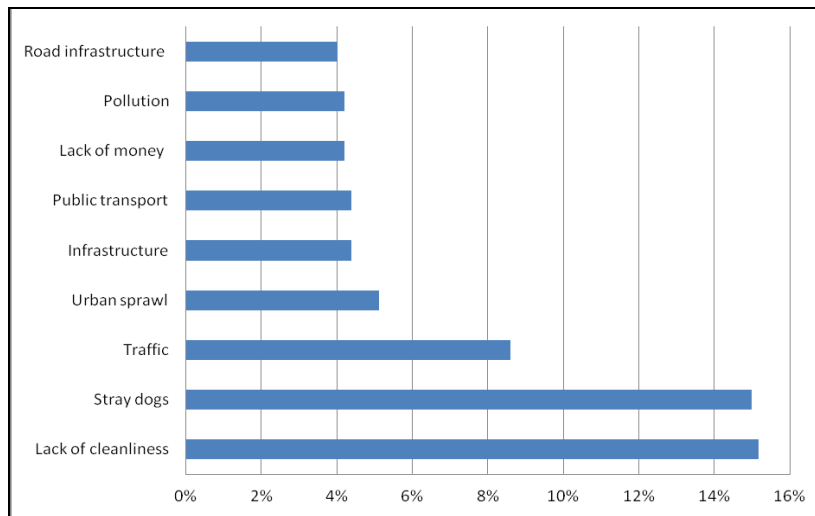


Figure no. 1: Which are, in your opinion, the most important problems facing Bucharest over the following 5 years?

B. Main challenges facing the city over the following 5 years

This set of questions evaluate a series of challenges that the two cities are about to face in the course of the following 5 years; interviewees were asked to rate them on a scale from 1 to 5, 5 being “most important” and 1 being “not at all important”.

Table no. 2: Standard of living - Bucharest

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Planning and the management of urban development	95.69%
2	An efficient transportation system, supporting the standard of living	96.21%
3	Increasing the number of parks and green areas	90.05%
4	Promoting recycling and sustainability	88.39%
5	Adopting green practices and environmental responsibility	87.93%
6	Current strategic planning and development management to ensure high standard of living	79.04%
7	Increasing the number of bicycle lanes and pedestrian areas	75.10%
8	The current number of parks and green areas matches your needs	74.64%
9	Horizontal expansion (The Metropolitan Area), to support the creation of a balanced community	74%

Table no. 3: Transportation - Bucharest

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Expanding public transportation network in Bucharest	92.95%
2	Reducing traffic jams on the main streets and secondary streets	95.18%
3	Building the 'overhead motorway' in Bucharest	67.18%
4	Promoting the use of alternative transportation and fuel economy	85.34%

Table no. 4: Social responsibility – Bucharest

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Spending efficiently the money received from taxation, to provide public services and facilities	93.81%
2	Efforts made by city administration to ensure responsibility towards taxpayers	92.77%
3	Efforts made by city administration to increase efficiency and cost control	91.82%
4	Investing in new technologies to improve the efficiency of public services	88.56%
5	Support from city administration to resident associations	71.15%
6	Support from city administration to support the development of community leaders	59.34%

Table no. 5: Economic development - Bucharest

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Creating jobs and encouraging the development of business	96.47%
2	Continuing the development of the centre of the city (the Old Town)	84.34%
3	Developing the banks of the river Dâmbovița	63.52%

Table no. 6: Community involvement - Bucharest

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Planning for emergency situations and calamities	92.66%
2	Efforts by city administration to accommodate and integrate the diverse needs of the population	84.55%
3	Efforts by city administration to involve the community in determining problems and priorities	82.63%
4	Organising events such as concerts and festivals	60.55%

Table no. 7: Basic public services - Bucharest

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Security and protection for residents	99.87%

2	Fire prevention and control	99.18%
3	Contribution by the city to providing social services to those in need	93.71%
4	Contribution by the city to provide residents with access to technology	90.26%
5	Recreational programmes for the young and for people with special needs	88.49%
6	Increasing the range of entertainment programmes	72.14%
7	Increasing the number of facilities to spend one's spare time	67.35%

Table no. 8: Challenges – Vancouver

Rank	Questions	Important and Most important
1	Reducing traffic congestion on arterial roadways and neighbourhood streets?	85.3%
2	Community planning and managing growth?	80.8%
3	Police protection and crime prevention?	80.0%
4	Creating jobs and encouraging business development?	78.6%
6	Fire protection and prevention?	70.5%
7	Are you getting your money's worth for your taxes?	70.0%
8	Bringing light rail to Vancouver?	65.0%
9	Enhancing parks and open space?	59.8%
10	Continued revitalization of Vancouver's downtown?	55.4%
12	Continued redevelopment of Vancouver's riverfront?	49.1%
13	Walking trails and bike lanes to community livability?	46.1%
14	Community events such as concerts in the park and July 4 th activities?	34.8%

C. Priorities and strategic investments

The third series of questions address one major project within the city. The Vancouver City Council wished to know the opinion of its residents about Light Rail, while in our study we have concentrated on the overhead highway.

In the survey conducted by Intercept Research Corporation, the conclusion has been that approximately two out of three (65%) residents surveyed believed light rail should be brought to Vancouver. Primary reasons for supporting light rail included: Would reduce traffic/congestion/bring traffic relief (54%); Would improve access to Portland/easy/convenient/connectivity (28%); Efficient means of travel/mass transit/good option (21%); Good for the environment/ecological benefits/would reduce pollution (17%).

To the question “In your opinion, should the overhead highway be built in Bucharest?”, a similar percentage, 63.35% of Bucharest residents gave an affirmative answer; 31.46% answered with ‘no’, and 5.19% did not answer the question. The reasons provided for supporting the project were that it would reduce traffic jams (51.49%); it would improve transit traffic (22.07%); it is necessary for the development of the city (10.40%); it would reduce time spent in traffic (7.25%); it would be beneficial for the environment, as it would lead to a decrease in fuel consumption (6.84%); and other reasons (1.96%).

There are also interesting motives to oppose the project: it is too expensive (32.60%); it is not a priority for the city budget (29.70%); it is not necessary (20.07%); it is technically unfeasible (17.64%).

The survey conducted among councilmen and City Council directors also reveals the political realities of the years 2008-2012. Thus, only 41.03% are in favour of the project, 48.72% are against it, and 10.26% choose not to answer. Arguments for and against it are similar: it is noteworthy that 42% of those who oppose it claim it would be too expensive.

D. Branding strategy

With regard to branding strategy, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 stands for ‘very good’ and 1 for ‘very poor’, we have asked the opinion of Bucharest residents and administrators about the current image of Bucharest. Data shows that opinion within the two groups is relatively homogenous, the only noteworthy difference being the abnormally high rate of non-answers among administrators (12.82%), compared to only 3.02% in the case of residents.

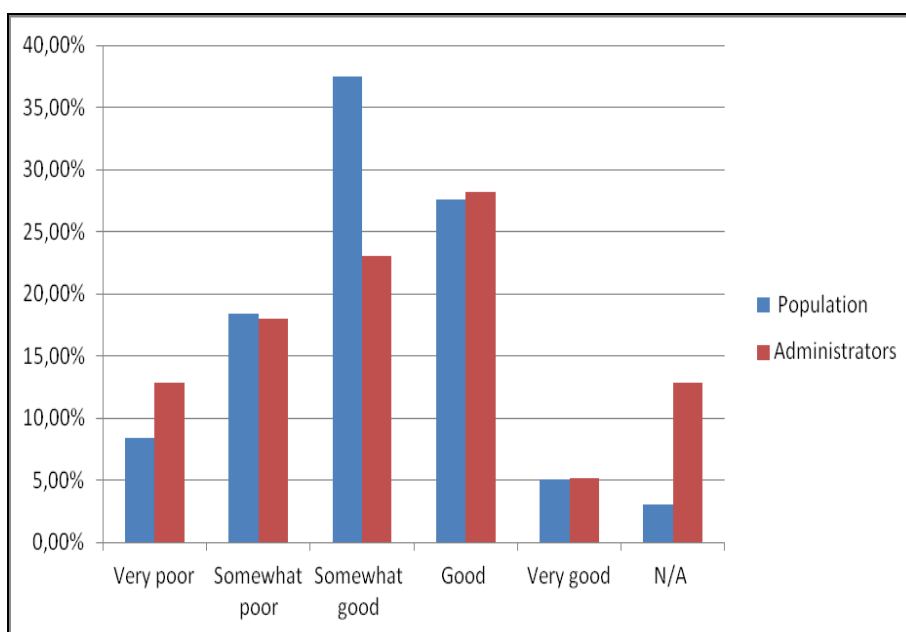


Figure no. 2: What is your opinion about the current image of Bucharest?

In the opinion of Bucharest residents, the cities with the best image in the world are Paris (13.54%), London (8.65%), Vienna (6.92%), Tokyo (3.75%), Barcelona (2.59%), Rome (2.59%), New York (2.31%), Prague (2.31%), while in the opinion of administrators it is Paris (25.71%), Vienna (20%), London (8.57%), Barcelona (5.71%), Geneva (5.71%), New York (5.71%), Tokyo (5.71%), Amsterdam (2.86%), Dubai (2.86%). Interviewees in both categories have identified the same cities as having the best image in the world (Paris, London, Vienna), one of the reasons being, no doubt, their geographical proximity.

According to the results of this survey, 50.02% of the people who dwell in the Capital would prefer Bucharest over any other city. 43% would like to live in another city, and 6.98% did not answer. It is interesting that of those who answered they would like to live in a different city, most indicated another urban community in Romania. Thus, the first options were for Sibiu 5.76%, Braşov 5.48%, Timișoara 3.46%, Cluj 2.31% and only then Vienna, with 1.44%. Administrators offered similar results: 53.85% prefer Bucharest, 30.77% would like to live in a different city and a high percentage, 15.38%, declined to answer.

Motivations offered by those who would like to live elsewhere were: cleanliness 29.39%, civilisation 12.10%, general aspect 11.53%, order 8.07%, development 4.32%, traffic 3.17%, while the administrators mentioned general aspect 19.23%, cleanliness 19.23%, efficient administration 15.38%, order 11.54%, personal reasons 11.54%, and history 7.69%.

The survey has also inquired about the opinion of residents about the elements, both positive and negative, which define the image of Bucharest as a city.

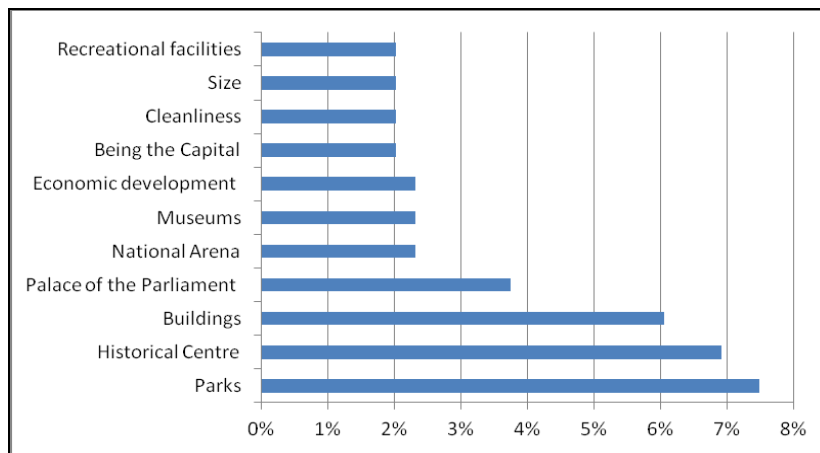


Figure no. 3: The positive elements which define the image of Bucharest as a city - Population answers

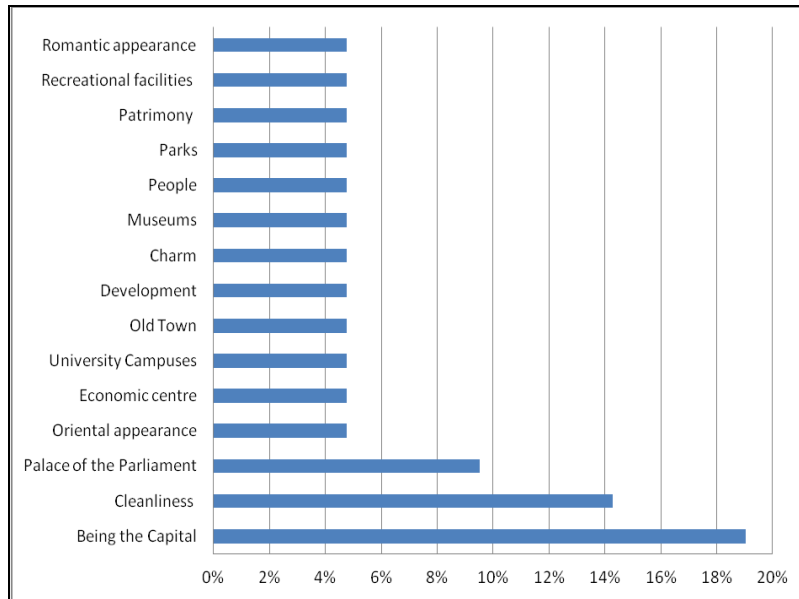


Figure no. 4: The positive elements which define the image of Bucharest as a city - Administrators answers

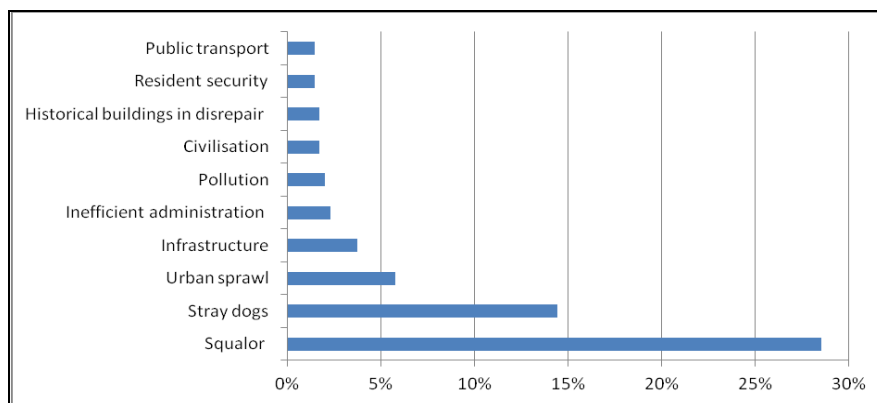


Figure no. 5: The negative elements which define the image of Bucharest as a city? Population answers

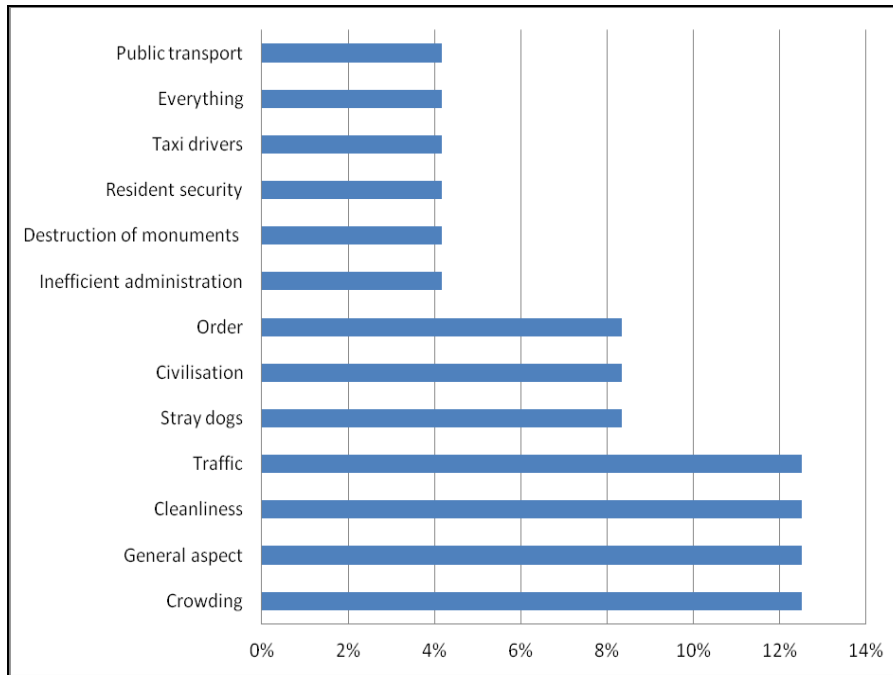


Figure no. 6: The negative elements which define the image of Bucharest as a city? - Administrators answers

Another key question in the survey was ‘Do you believe that the Bucharest City Council has, at the present moment, a strategy for the image of the city?’, and this reveals a great rift between the two categories of interviewees. Thus, the general public sample answered ‘Yes’ in fairly large numbers (51.63%). 41.71% answered ‘No’ and 6.66% gave no answer. On the other hand, only 23.08% of administrators believe the City Council has a strategy. A wide majority of 69.23% believe the answer is negative and 7.69% did not answer.

The next step in the survey was to inquire for possible solutions offered by interviewees, in particular elements of Bucharest’s image which ought to be introduced in a future strategy for the development of the city’s image.

According to this survey, the inhabitants of Bucharest consider that this strategy ought to include the following: cleanliness 14.41%, creating parks and green spaces 6.63%, infrastructure 6.05%, tourism 4.03%, administration 3.17%, dog shelters 2.31%, civilisation 2.02%, public transport 2.02%, the Palace of the Parliament 1.73% and the Old Town 1.73%.

The first ten elements mentioned by administrators were, by order of frequency, tourism 18.52%, the aspect of buildings 11.11%, organisation 11.11%, history 7.41%, Old Town 3.70%, civilisation 3.70%, the development of the Metropolitan Area 3.70%, cultural elements 3.70%, public image 3.70% and the Palace of the Parliament 3.70%.

Interviewees were then asked to mention the landmarks which ought to be promoted by the local administration. Among the 10 most frequently mentioned monuments were the Old Town 25.36%, museums 21.61%, the Palace of the Parliament 18.44%, parks 4.03%, Arc

de Triomphe 1.73%, The Romanian Athenaeum 1.44%, old buildings 0.86%, the Botanical Garden 0.86%, monasteries 0.86% and the Antipa Museum for Natural History 0.86%.

In the administrator survey, the Old Town was also the first choice, with 32.35%, followed by the Palace of the Parliament (26.47%), museums (11.76%), parks (8.82%), the Arc de Triomphe (2.94%), the Magheru Boulevard (2.94%), Casa Scânteii (2.94%), old buildings (2.94%), history (2.94%) and the Opera House (2.94%).

The last question of the survey asked the interviewees to express their opinion about the symbol which might best represent Bucharest. 98 answers were offered and the five most frequently mentioned landmarks were the Palace of the Parliament (30.84%), the Arc de Triomphe (7.49%), the Old Town (7.49%), the Romanian Athenaeum (6.34%) and University Square (2.59%). The choices of the administrators were the Palace of the Parliament (39.29%), the Romanian Athenaeum (10.71%), the Old Town (10.71%), the Arc de Triomphe (3.57%) and the Dâmbovița River (3.57%).

4. Strategic directions and best practices in elaborating and implementing the development and branding strategy for the City of Bucharest

Following the comparative analysis between the two urban development strategies, in Vancouver and Bucharest, and taking into account the analysis of the results provided by the survey regarding “The Optimal development directions for the City of Bucharest”, we have identified the main strategic directions, branding elements and best practices necessary for the elaboration of a development and branding strategy for the City of Bucharest:

- With regard to **the direction in which Bucharest is heading**, one must notice the optimism manifested both by the residents and by the administrators of the city, of whom a net majority consider that the community is heading in the right direction, without failing to notice, however, that a substantial minority, approximately 30%, have a negative perception on its evolution (in both categories).

- **The most important problems that the city administration will have to tackle over the next five years** and which represent fundamental elements in any development strategy are: lack of cleanliness, stray dogs, traffic, urban sprawl and infrastructure.

- In determining **the strategic objectives for the future development strategy**, the following priorities ought to be taken into account with respect to:

- **Standards of life** - the inhabitants have considered the following elements as being top priorities: planning and urban development management and an efficient transportation system, improving the standard of living within the city;

- **Transportation** - residents have considered the following to be of the utmost importance: expanding the public transport network, reducing traffic jams on the main streets and on secondary streets and building the overhead motorway;

- **Social responsibility** - residents have indicated the following items as ranking highest on their list of desires: efficiency in spending funds obtained through taxation and turning them into public services and facilities; the administration ought to make efforts to

ensure responsibility towards taxpayers, increase efficiency and control costs; it should also invest in technology in order to improve the efficiency of the services provided;

– *Economic development* - residents indicated as priorities the creation of jobs and encouraging a friendly business environment, continuous development of the Old Town and the improvements to the riverfront.

– *Community involvement* - residents have indicated their interest in the following: planning for emergency situations and calamities, efforts by city administration to accommodate and integrate the diverse needs of the population and efforts by city administration to involve the community in determining problems and priorities;

Regarding the social responsibility, the economic development and community involvement as priorities for the city development strategy both, population and residents, ignored two main pillars that can contribute at the development of the city: the corporatist social responsibility and the environment protection and ecological education.

About the implication of the multinationals in the local community activities we have to say that companies need partners in order to support corporatist social responsibility activities. An essential partner is the community itself, because the community's needs are the premise and the substance that mould CSR programs. (Obrad and all, 2011, p. 53).

Regarding the second pillar, we can say that over the last decades, the ecological education has become a major topic both for the education system and the mass-media, political community, civil society and companies (Marinescu and Burcea, 2012, p. 142) and it is necessary that the administrators of Bucharest city together with the educational units, local and national mass-media and private companies to action more in this direction.

– *Basic public services* - residents have designated the following as top priorities: Security and protection for residents, fire prevention and control, contribution by the city to providing social services to those in need.

• Following primary investigations which have led to the elaboration of the survey, it has become apparent that **the most important large-scale project for the city, which entails a substantial investment, is the building of the overhead highway.**

The survey has demonstrated that most residents support this project, but that administrators have reservations about starting it, mainly due to considerations of costs or technical difficulties. Although it is an extremely useful project for the city, given the many benefits it would provide (such as reducing traffic jams, improving transit traffic and reducing time spent in traffic), the attitude shown by administrators is, nevertheless, entirely understandable, given that they hold the political and social responsibility to ensure the costs of the projects do not exceed its benefits.

• An essential element for any **viable urban development strategy is to include in it aspects relating to the city's image and brand, elements which will ensure a competitive advantage for that community.**

Thus, in the case of Bucharest, there is a consensus about the current image of the city – as starting point in delineating a branding strategy – between administrators and residents: the city's image falls somewhere between 'somewhat good' and 'good'.

In order to elaborate the branding strategy for Bucharest, the following items have been identified as associated with the city's image:

- Positive elements: parks, the Old Town, buildings, the Palace of the Parliament and the National Arena (as mentioned by the general public), the status of the city as Capital of the country, cleanliness, Palace of the Parliament, the Oriental aspect, its position as economic and academic centre (from the point of view of administrators);

- Negative elements: squalor, stray dogs, crowding, poor infrastructure and administration (from the point of view of the residents), crowding, squalor, traffic and stray dogs (as indicated by administrators).

The survey has identified the following solutions, which are essential in elaborating any future branding strategy for the city: cleanliness, creating green areas, developing infrastructure, promoting tourism and increasing the efficiency of administration (as mentioned by residents) and promoting tourism, the aspect of buildings, rendering administration more effective, promoting the city's history, as embodied by the Old Town (from the point of view of administrators).

A branding strategy must take into account the promotion of the city's landmarks. The most important monuments – with the potential to draw in tourists – are the Old Town, the museums, the Palace of the Parliament, the parks and the Arc de Triomphe. In this case, the views of residents and decision-makers converge.

In so far as identifying a symbol for Bucharest is concerned, of the 98 solutions offered by interviewees, the Palace of the Parliament has emerged as the preferred choice, both in the resident and in the administrator survey.

All these elements may successfully contribute to the elaboration of a branding strategy for our city, which may place Bucharest firmly on the map, next to the other great European capitals, emulating Paris, the city considered to have the best image in the eyes of both residents and decision-makers.

Conclusions and recommendations

Acting on the belief that citizens desire and deserve a good administration and quality public services strategic planning and branding strategy may be useful and may even be used as essential instruments in delivering better government.

Local communities in Romania, and implicitly Bucharest, must first conduct an analysis of deficiencies and obstacles faced in the process of strategic planning and branding, identify the main problems that the community is likely to face over the following five years, and indicate the development priorities, specific branding elements (image, positive and negative aspects, symbol etc.) and eventually determine its strategies taking into consideration a series of recommendations and suggestions, based on the best practices identified in the process of strategic planning and branding.

Moreover, the process of strategic planning and branding must concentrate more on identifying and solving critical issues, trying to tie in strategic planning and budgeting, while at the same time attempting to coordinate better the political aspects and facilitate communication at all levels.

In order to devise an efficient strategy, it is necessary to integrate elements of strategic planning with performance indicators, to elaborate a strategic plan spanning 5 to 10 years and to monitor performance, based on specific indicators.

Strategic planning must be a 'citizen-oriented planning process', whereby the delineation of the vision and missions, as well as of the strategic objectives must be made on the basis of massive public participation, in which public policy experts, members of the administration and representatives of the general public should work together and agree on the development and branding strategy which is being adopted.

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