Territorial Branding and the Authentic Rural Communities of Romania

Case Study—Ţara[1] Beiuşului (The Land of Beiuş, Romania)

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Introduction

THE ECONOMIC mutations of the last two decades (the decrease in importance of the distance between different places, the development of information technology and of the e-economy, capital migration and investment relocation, the globalization of a large spectrum of processes, tendencies and values etc.) have attracted the communities within the globalized competitive economic system, based on the principles of competition and production, determining different forms of adaptation of the territories to the new realities. Taking part in the global competition, they try to reposition themselves, resulting in changes of the territorial configurations generated by the specific national and European policies, which boost quality and innovation, the two being regarded as the essential drivers of competitiveness.

In the aforementioned context, two tendencies are notable. On the one hand, a separation of the types of informal economy from the local realities and the apparition of global cities, of the so-called "creative class" (Florida 2005), characteristic to the big cities. On the other hand, an opposite tendency is emerging, that of "returning" to the "local", along with the founding of development strategies on the basis of identity and heritage values specific to the rural areas whose chances of success are dependent on the local development of a neo-endogenous type (Ray 2006) and heritage type (Landel and Koop 2011).

Thus, the importance of territorial identity—understood as "the presence of the social capital; cultural and natural inheritance; creativity, local know-how and specificity; productive vocation, uniqueness and comparative advantage" or as "the improvement of the social capital; the capacity of developing a widely-accepted territorial vision; specificity; strong productive vocation" for the local development, along with the other two main territorial cohesion components (territorial quality and territorial efficiency)—is highlighted by the

academic literature, underlined by the latest EPSON research (ESPON 2011, ESPON 2013) and expressed in the strategic orientations defined by the European Union. One more step remained to be taken from here to the creation of the regional and local brands, as an expression of the territorial identity and a proof of localization in a globalized world.

Territorial branding is used more and more in the local and regional approach. "One can see this as a translation of product branding into the public administration area and the emergence of new territorial management models with an entrepreneurial touch" (Petrea et al. 2013, 125), as an active territorial management tool corresponds to the necessity of projecting certain synthetic and representative images towards the external medium with the purpose of increasing territorial attraction (tourist, investment and residential attraction etc.). The emergence of territorial marketing and branding has subsequently become a consequence of the new form of territorial governance (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005, Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2011)—territorial branding is considered an economic development strategy passed through the marketing filter (Greenberg 2008), transposing the business concepts and techniques into public management tools.

The use of territorial branding does not target only the economic advantages, but it especially envisages the promotion of sustainable development within which the image of a territory is included in a long-term strategy (Vela 2013), an aspect that presumes a process of "local innovation." However, in order to foster local innovation, the development strategies have to place at their basis the ancestral values (Albino and Leăo 1997, 113) and the local heritage. Associated with other elements, the local heritage confers them the qualities that transform them in specific territorial resources, different from the classical and generic ones (Pecqueur 2000). Thus, the original territorial resources, of material or immaterial nature, are integrated in a new "entrepreneurial logic of the patrimonial economy that allows certain territories to highlight their characteristic activities, by creating, transmitting and renewing their own technical, social and economic culture, for long periods of time, integrating man, community life and creativity" (Guesnier and Lemaignan 2004, 139).

This context, favoring the increase in importance of the local factors and encouraging the communities' participation in the local development process, offers new opportunities for valorizing the rural space potential that still conserves authentic features in Romania.

The main idea of the study is that the valorization of the unexploited capital of the territorial identity characterizing the authentic rural spaces represents an opportunity for a generalized increase in attraction and for the development chances of these territories in the global competition. The authors interpret the "territorial identity of authentic rural spaces" as an original as well as valuable local resource, whose valorization has to be done through a territorial management strategy that is well coagulated and adapted to the local specificity (based on the motto: "think global and act local").

The present case study proposes the model construction of a territorial brand that reflects and promotes the Land of Beiuş within the perception, conscience and the interest of a wide public in the country and abroad, the land having a valuable identity heritage. The presented model is built on the basis of an identity evaluation of the tradition and local specificity and could be also adapted for the building of "profiles" with a certain visual and emotional impact for other rural spaces displaying such characteristics in Romania. Hence, the possibility of using the brand with the significance

of "authentic national inheritance" for the revival of the authentic archetypal symbols of the other areas called "lands" (Romanian "țară") (Filimon et.al. 2014) is explored as a potential factor for generating a dynamics of the traditional rural space economy. In addition to this, the study highlights the positive impact that the territorial identity, once "rediscovered," cultivated and promoted, can have in the development of the communities in the authentic rural spaces.

Territorial Identity and Authentic Rural Spaces

THE LATEST scientific literature shows an increase in the concerns related to territorial identity, with the dual approach of this problematic standing out, namely, the pro-identity view (with an emphasis on development, valorization and promotion) being counterpoised to the anti-identity one (which operates through notions and practices connected to the degradation of the environmental, economic, cultural and other identity characteristics).

A particular interest is raised by the role played by historical archetypes written in the primary matrix of the geographical space (due to its economic, social, cultural, spiritual and perceptual attributes) and their integration in the territorial development equation which is based on the valorization of the local communities' identity (Harner 2001, 678). Synergistically interpreted and correctly managed, local identity can lead to the maximum fulfillment of the territorial resources potential, which signifies that it can become, under certain circumstances, an important factor of economic growth.

Among the variety of views related to the content of the territorial identity, one is of particular interest to the authors. It defines identity as a set of components, substance and energy fluxes spatially materialized under the form of geographical "places" and "regions," namely, territorial units with specific physiognomies (landscapes) "impregnated" with a certain lifestyle (fig. 1). The spatial components are represented by the sum of the permanent elements or by the ones temporarily rooted into the physical environment, into the human community and into the economic structures, as well as in the communities' cultural heritage. The spatial fluxes are relatively stable functional relationships connecting nature, society, economy and culture within a coherently functioning unit, hence offering specificity to the lifestyle within a territory (Roca and Roca 2007).

Despite the intrinsic values it contains, the notion of territorial identity is an easily fading trait. The external environmental pressure and the perception alteration coming with it induce degradation phenomena, the disregard for or marginalization of trends of a reality subjectively portrayed at one point as being old-fashioned. Under such circumstances, the matter of the recovery of original endogenous values comes into the light, including the symbols and the various meanings associated to them, as well as their restoration as possible development vectors. Territorial branding is included among the "smart" tools whose effectiveness in this respect has previously been confirmed.
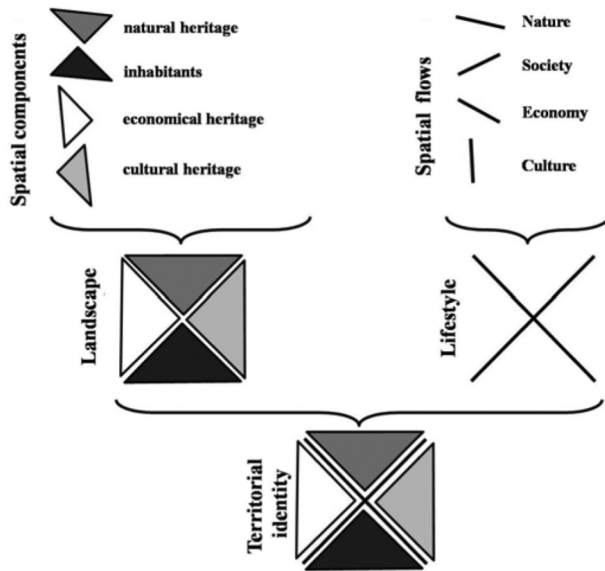
Figure 1: Territorial identity. Territorial components and fluxes (Roca and Roca 2007)

Territorial Branding as a Tool for the Development of Authentic Rural Spaces

THE INTUITION, conception, elaboration and establishment of a territorial brand is a complex process that involves many territorial variables and actors with utterly different backgrounds. The main objective of this process targets a higher level of valorization of the whole of the available territorial resources, some of which have been ignored, forgotten or neglected, such as: the natural potential (unusual geographical forms, hydrological units, biocenoses, landscapes of great quality and so on), local raw materials, economic practices, traditional crafts (and implicitly the resulting products), cultural and spiritual representations (myths, legends, traditional holidays, traditional clothing, customs, religious landmarks and so on). The way to achieve the actual valorization of the aforementioned resources is intermediated by branding or, in a wider sense, by the set of systematic procedures followed in order to identify the territorial components, their unique relationships, and to subsequently transpose them into a series of diverse graphical representations (logos). These have a cognitive, visual and emotional impact, which is likely to facilitate the easy recognition of characteristics (traits, traditions) underlying the foundation of the territorial "ego," namely, underlying the qualities that give uniqueness to a place or to a region. This process of "awakening" or "revival" of the latent resources, followed by their metamorphosis through graphical reconversion and mental suggestion, can have beneficial implications on the other functions operating in an area (place, geographical region and/or administrative territorial unit).

Therefore, branding can become a useful territorial managing tool, leading slowly to increased benefits for the community, via the implemented policies and management. It can also result in an increased competitiveness generated by quality (Franch et al. 2006). The synergetic potential of a valuable brand can be considerably amplified when its structure incorporates, to the widest extent possible and through an ample design and implementation, its main strong points: accessibility, easy memorization, content truthfulness, familiarity, positive connotation, extension, low marketing costs, confidence and so on (Nedeljković-Pravdić 2010). This is why the brand function of origin and property identification occupies an important place within development strategies. The recourse to the territorial brand is made especially for identity representation and for highlighting the space whose owner is the local community which identifies itself with the landmarks transmitting a message of cohesion and local creativity to the external environment (Mateo and Seisdedos 2010).

In our opinion, it is absolutely necessary to highlight the importance of accurate identity representation, another key factor for the establishment of a brand and one which is in total concordance with the characteristics of the present approach. Capturing the places/localities/regions' "characteristics," built on the communion and profound fusion of physical, social, economic, historic and cultural factors up to the edification of a genuine *genre de vie* (de la Blache 1921, 328), that "lifestyle" that is basically the "pillar" of the territorial identity, cannot be ignored in the process of devising an authentic brand. The affirmation of territorial identity through the use of brands supposes the actual rediscovery of the vigorous ancestral roots underlying the various space types (geographical, historical, cultural, and so on) composing the diverse territorial palimpsest of today.

In conclusion, territorial branding proposes the "rediscovery," "reinvention" and "reaffirmation" of places through a process of conception and representation materialized in a brand focalized on the accurate representation of place characteristics and on the promotion of place identity with its specific characteristics. Under these circumstances the branding strategies can be integrated in a global process of place development, in close connection with marketing strategies (Fernández-Cavia 2011), the brand being used as a foundation for place marketing (López-Lita and Benlloch 2006).

The promotion of territories through branding needs an integrated strategic approach. The brand can be accompanied by local products specific to the area, integrated branding being a guarantee of the intrinsic quality of the products and services, of authenticity, hence creating a mechanism of potentiating identity values. Many different types of identity promotion can be resorted to: logotypes (with the name of the place/locality/region/territorial administrative unit etc.), text associated with symbols, evocative images etc. But the place rediscovery and identity reinterpretation through a branding process, interpreted in this case as the constructive instrument of a new territorial resource, cannot be separated from the local group actions that actually built heritage goods that need a corresponding valorization and implicitly, conservation.

We consider that, if interpreted as a construction within which operate identity recognition and its patrimonialization (Requier-Desjardins 2009), the territory can represent in the case of the authentic Romanian rural spaces a legitimate variable in the design of local development and for a viable territorial construction, having France as a suc-

cessful model. Territorial identity can constitute a strong "motivational capital" (Requier-Desjardins 2009), which has to be mobilized accordingly in the development process of the territories that have it, as it constitutes an advantage of the mainly rural spaces in their competition against the urban ones. Hence, through the emergence of economic and environmental sustainability, based on the conservation of territorial identity and on territorial pride, the authentic rural spaces can be the beneficiary of this type of territorial development strategy.

How the Romanian Land-Type Areas Fit into the Process

In this context we consider that the "land"-type places existing in Romania have still kept from their history a multitude of authentic identity elements, paving the way for a certain perspective of their valorization as unique resources, with a high attraction potential. According to the local specificity manifested through different traditions in every one of the 18 "land"-type places, there have been identified four categories of identity elements that could found just as many representative brands, namely: the traditional brand, the architectural brand, the symbolic brand (historical) and the cultural brand (ethnographic) (Cocean 2011; Cocean 2012).

The territories of the "land" type have been the object of numerous geographical, historical, sociological, ethnographical and traditional studies, representing the beginning in the harnessing of the identity heritage as a key resource for the sustainable development of these "lands."

The present paper, which is an essentially applicative one, is centered on a case study, namely, on the "construction" of the Land of Beiuş territorial brand, an area considered among the most representative authentic Romanian rural spaces, displaying a territorial identity heavily materialized at a landscape and heritage level. The study also explores the possibility of developing territorial brands for other rural places possessing such attributes. Not least, the present study comes to continue the previous research related to territorial branding (seen as a component of territorial marketing) as a stimulus to local development (Petrea et al. 2013).

In order to create the Land of Beiuş brand, one has taken into account the internal realities as well as the relationships with the external environment. "There are at least two important things for the public authority representatives when engaging in a city branding process. First, close attention has to be paid to closing the gap between the identity of the city and its image" (Petrea et al. 2013, 138). Practically, the brand "is born" within an endogenous/exogenous interface-type environment, on the basis of certain specific strategies that place the methodology in a relational context which connects intuition and design with promotion, implementation and finally, with establishment (if the brand has sufficient symbolic "force" and significance - fig. 2).

For territorial branding, a few steps have been established, steps considered as mandatory in the elaboration stage and in the implementation phase (fig. 3).

The brand as a territorial management instrument has to bring the local community of the Land of Beiuş around itself, in order for them to *rediscover* its specific identity
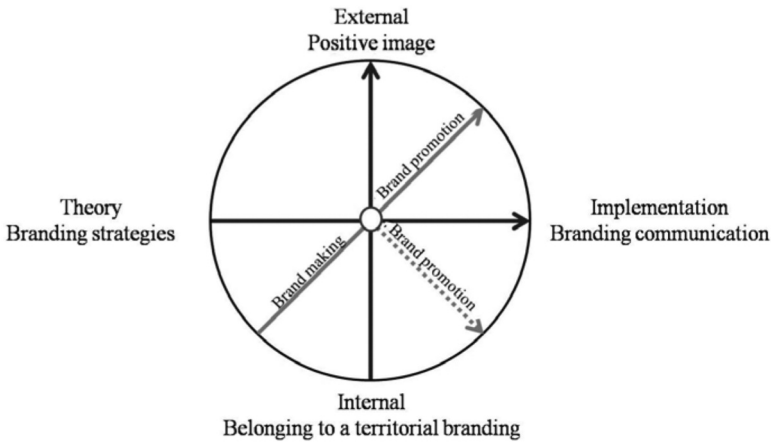
FIGURE 2: The contextual model for devising a territorial brand

elements as compared to other places. Once having discovered or rediscovered and accepted these elements, they practically become the "DNA" of the territorial branding. Its "genes" selectively include identity elements that in time have significantly impregnated the collective memory: local symbols, uncommon places, crafts, traditional objects, personalities, monuments and so on. Such identity elements with symbolic value, deeply rooted within the collective memory, have to be valorized at the community level through an attentive and refined education that cultivates feelings of attachment with respect to them, the will to assume them and the necessity to preserve and valorize them, the possibility to share them with other communities and so on. The capitalization of these

FIGURE 3: The stages for building a territorial brand

collective symbols and their promotion so that the local community can benefit from them through brands determine an increase in territorial attraction which is easy to integrate within the durable development strategies. The strategies based on territorial individuality lead to a certain attraction in the relationship with the external environment, stimulating the neighboring areas to preoccupy themselves with the definition of their identity.
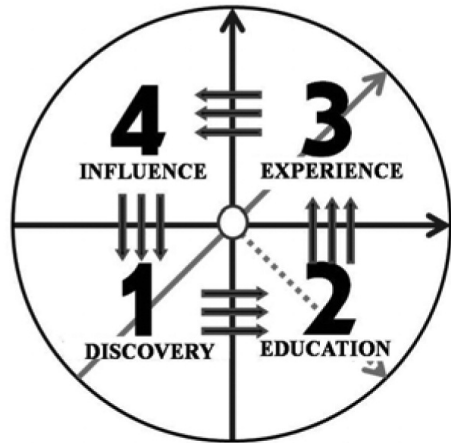
The Land of Beiuş,
the Making of the Territorial Branding

THE PRESENCE of specific elements conferring identity to certain places as opposed to others is an excellent premise for the territorial development planning of the "land"-type regions, on the basis of the neo-endogenous model and the patrimonial one, having as a central indicator the territorial identity and its local heritage. We consider that the valorization of the uniqueness and identity of the traditional Romanian geographic regions within the sustainable local development strategies is a real opportunity for the dissemination of local development policies throughout the entire country.

The pillars of the territorial branding strategy of the Land of Beiuş consist of identity elements which were identified by employing the territorial diagnosis method. For an efficient communication, identity elements have been transposed into images as composing elements of the brand. Consequently, starting from identity elements found within the local Land of Beiuş communities, a new "logo"-type model was created, playing the role of interface between the identity characteristics deeply rooted within the physical place as well as within the mental space, namely, the necessity of an appealing territorial promotion from within towards the external environment.

Regarding the Land of Beiuş, the identity elements found in the lifestyle and the collective mental space are numerous and original, and they are the result of a centuries-old symbiosis between the community and its environment.

A first representative identity element is established in relationship with the geographical space of the Land of Beiuş. The specific topography constituting the physical space in which the Land of Beiuş has crystallized is a hilly depression flanked on three sides by mountainous ranges separated by a "gulf"-like plain unit entering from the west, which in its turn is flanked by piedmont hills. The relative isolation and the rough topography unsuitable for agricultural exploitation have led to certain traditional and subsistence agricultural practices, activities which are mostly associated with a rudimentary lifestyle. The local resources have allowed the development of crafts and the making of characteristic products. Thus, the woods have favored the development of a wood civilization, important identity landmark of the place around Beiuş (Petrea et. al. 2012). A variety of hand-made wood products preserved until nowadays prove the creativity of the craftsmen in this land: the Budureasa dowry box, wooden gates, traditional furniture pieces, useful household items, traditional agricultural tools and so on. These compose a valuable heritage combining the local people's tradition, craftsmanship and skills. Even though the majority of these products have already lost their economic utility, their symbolic value is still intact and therefore they constitute identity elements of the local heritage that can be a part of the local brand.

The city of Beiuş, the polarizing center of the Land of Beiuş since the Middle Ages, has favored the emergence of the rural communities' authentic values and it has affirmed itself in history as a representative city for the Romanian emancipation spirit within the Transylvanian space. Samuil Vulcan High school played an important role in this respect, being an emblematic symbol for education and a generator of values and local identity promoter whose name is connected to many representative figures of the national intellectual elite.

Another representative element for the local community is "Târgul din Beiuș" (the fair of Beiuș). Taking place on a weekly basis, it used to be the most important socio-economic event, a communication channel promoting the identity of the rural community in the region. Nowadays, even though its economic role has significantly diminished, it continues to be a symbol of rural authenticity.

The economic and political transformations imposed by the communist regime have left an imprint on the regional evolution and have diminished to a certain extent the traditional values of the Land of Beiuș (Filimon et. al. 2012). New values, symbols and crafts were created after 1990 (the towns of Nucet and Ștei, emblems of the communist period). The change to a market economy and the need for an economic revival led to the apparition of new companies, such as, for example, the European Drinks concern. Some of the traditional activities have lost their economic utility (Filimon 2012), being kept only as identity elements with an ethnographic and folkloric value (sewing, pottery, quenching of slaked lime etc.). On the other hand, others—such as the use of medicinal plants—have seen a revival, making possible development directions of an ecological nature, based on the local characteristics.

Following the same pattern, the post-communist transition, marked by an identity crisis, has determined the filtering of the multiple values due to the need to assert a new identity.

Transposing the identity elements of the Beiuș communities into visual symbols is an essential step within the territorial branding process. Among the characteristic identity elements for the Land of Beiuș (traditions, ethnography, authentic folklore, crafts, the Beiuș fair, the communist heritage, traditional agriculture and the European Drinks concern) a series of local symbols have been selected according to the existent perceptions regarding the communities' attachment to them. After the selection of symbolic identity elements which are likely to accurately reflect the unicity and specificity of the Land of Beiuș at a national and international level, this study

FIGURE 4: The Land of Beiuș. Identity elements with symbolic values (inner circle) and complementary identity elements (outer circle)

proposes that the regional brand should encompass the dowry box, the horn-violin, Samuil Vulcan High School of Beiuș, and the traditional valorization of medicinal plants practiced at Poieni de Jos (Fig. 5).

For the visual expression of the Land of Beiuș brand the authors propose the logo presented on this page (fig.5).

The authors propose that the dowry box be adopted as a model logo for all the regional units in Romania (ethno-historic and/or administrative), possessing a high degree of rurality and being distinct for its richness and originality of the cultural heritage. The dowry box becomes, under these circumstances, a profound and highly suggestive

Table 1. The Land of Beiuş. Identity elements with a symbolic value

The dowry box is the most representative piece of traditional furniture in the Land of Beiuş, nationally known due to its particularities: the biggest dimensions in the country, complex geometrical ornaments with symbolic connotations relating to the past, made by carpentry technique in smoked beech or oak wood, the smoking being done for esthetical purposes as well as for an increase in resistance (Petrea et. al. 2012).

The horn-violin (*higheghe*), a unique element in Romania, even though very common in the past all over Transylvania, has remained as an identity landmark for traditional music in the Land of Beiuş, combining traditional values, the inhabitants' creativity and their artistic feeling. (Petrea et al. 2012).

Samuil Vulcan National College (High School), emblematic landmark of Romanian education and culture, leader in keeping the national identity[2], still represents—just like it did in the past—a bridge between the traditional values and the Beiuş elite.

The traditional valorization of medicinal plants according to the local development model of Poieni de Jos, grounded in a local production system based on medicinal plants and their derivatives. The inhabitants of the commune identify themselves with this activity which represents today an example of rural success with national echoes.

symbol given its function of keeping traditions, customs and heritage goods unaltered, all of them being at the very foundation of the regional and national authenticity. At the level of every regional brand there can be introduced differentiating elements in accordance to the brands of other regions ("lands"). For example, for the Land of Beiuș, the decorative motifs on the dowry box have a correspondent in the other identity elements with a symbolic value. The common message that the authors propose for the brand of all the land-type regional units in Romania is the expression "zestrea noastră, a tuturor" ("our dowry, belonging to all of us") interpreted the heritage received from our ancestors, ensuring the foundation and the endurance of future constructs.

FIGURE 5: Logo proposal for the Land of Beiuș brand

The transposition of identity elements within the frame of the territorial brand and the calibration of the future regional development objectives on the valorization of local specificity can contribute to the improvement of a traditionally strong territorial coherence. Of course, the development trajectory has to be embraced by both public and private actors, as well as by the local communities within a systematic process in which specialists of various backgrounds have to get involved (historians, ethnographers, sociologists, geographers, architects, graphic artists and of course, the public administration). Having already been successfully applied at the level of cities, as a tool for the positive image promotion of a territory, the territorial branding stands out more and more among the "smart" instruments which can be used with more confidence to increase the appeal of rural places.

The inclusion of branding in the territorial development strategies improves visibility at an external level, introducing an added-value in the global competition. A few steps in that direction have already been made in the geographical literature. We dare to go a bit further in this direction by considering that due to the affective connotations ("my land," "our land") the term "land" can represent a successful brand for the wide majority of authentic rural spaces in Romania, symbolizing identity and heritage elements, authenticity and national specificity, expressed through its diverse facets: historical, cultural, ethnographic.

Conclusion

WITHIN THE context of an increasing competition among territories, we consider that the territorial identity of authentic rural spaces can become an important recognition element, a factor of differentiation in their (re)positioning with respect to the external environment. The rediscovery and the reinterpretation of a place's identity under the form of a territorial brand can be a strategic option in territorial development.

In the case of these rural spaces, identity values can be used as original local resources for increasing attractiveness. By including identity elements and setting the objectives of future development in the valorization of the local specificity under the form of a territorial brand, the traditionally strong territorial coherence within these areas can be enhanced.

The uniqueness and specificity of the Land of Beiuş is highlighted by selecting identity elements and integrating the local symbols in a model logo playing the role of an interface between the identity characteristics deeply rooted within the space covered by the region and the necessities of an attractive and beneficial promotion of this territory towards the external environment. Basically, the symbols reflect the most appreciated local characteristics through which the community rediscovers, identifies and recognizes itself, in order to be able to make itself known to other communities. The territorial brand of the Land of Beiuş proposed by the present study can represent a model with applicability to any space which displays a strong territorial identity and, in particular, to any other Romanian "land"-type space.

The present study considers as a real opportunity the territorialization of the Romanian local development policies at the level of the entire country, by valorizing the regional specificity and including identity and authenticity elements in the local sustainable development strategies, thus opening new lines of approach for the present research.

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Notes

1. Within the Romanian space there exist 18 "land"-type spaces (Ţara) occupying a special place within the national identity, being considered as true archetypal mental spaces of the Romanian people (Cocean 1997, 2006). They are the result of a long and complex process of integration of the geographical conditions with the historical events, the socio-economic activities and the political and cultural experiences. Even though at present they do not have a real administrative significance, their regional coherence is remarkable if one considers their accentuated rural level, the population's conservatism and especially the preservation of traditional culture in an almost intact and "lively" form, only little affected by the modern and postmodern values (Filimon et al. 2012, 51).

2. Founded in Beiuş by Bishop Samuil Vulcan in 1828, the Samuil Vulcan National College played a very important role in the preservation of the national spirit, at a time when only in Bihor there were 338 Romanian villages, to say nothing of the departments of Arad, Satu Mare, Maramureş, Timiş (with a population of about 2 million Romanians), which had no Romanian secondary school (Pavel 1928). It contributed decisively to the emergence of the Romanian intellectual class which was later actively involved in the fight for national liberation.

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Abstract
Territorial Branding and the Authentic Rural Communities of Romania: Case Study—Ţara Beiuşului (The Land of Beiuş, Romania)

The present study highlights the valences of territorial branding, or indeed those of place branding, as an instrument for increasing the attraction of authentic rural spaces by highlighting the identity, the traditions and the local specificity, reinterpreted as original local development resources. The theoretical argumentation of territorial branding as a "smart" territorial management tool is exemplified by applying these concepts to the Land of Beiuş, a representative Romanian geographical-historic area, an old land, strongly coagulated, with a powerful territorial identity, which, nonetheless, is dealing nowadays with severe socio-economic difficulties. The study results consist of an actual territorial branding model, conceived so as to express the identity and originality of the local heritage, a model applicable to any type of territory with a strong territorial identity, such as the other Romanian "land-type (Ţară)" areas.