

Section V
MARKETING AND TOURISM

**A STUDY OF THE IMAGE OF TULIP SYMPHONY - A DEFINING
INGREDIENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE URBAN BRAND
OF PITEȘTI**

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Abstract:

The city is a fundamental element of the identity of contemporary society, fulfilling in each urban community complex functions that depend on the needs, interests and aspirations of the people and of the political and economic system. The urban identity of Pitesti is defined by a set of features with certain significance for each inhabitant of the city. The Tulip Symphony is a symbol that has been created, developed and promoted during the past four decades by the urban community. The present study aims to study how residents of Pitesti perceive the urban product named the Tulip Symphony is and present the conclusions of a statistical survey conducted during the 37th edition of the event.

Keywords: *research, urban marketing, urban image, urban brand, the Tulip Symphony.*

JEL Classification: M31, M38, H83

1. Introduction

Recent decades saw many urban communities increasing their focus on defining a city brand in order to develop and promote local and national cultural values. The global world revealed strong competition between countries, cities and regions that are striving to attract more tourists, more investors and support the community through various activities and events tailored to suit each place where people live.

The city is a set of traditional and modern values, of human and material resources that help people identify with the city's values. Just as, for example, a product is not necessarily bought and sold for the raw material it's made of, but for its perceived value, a city is more than a combination of streets, buildings, institutions, parks, shops, restaurants: it goes through a long and complex process to become a brand and the *sum of all perceptions and associations that people have in relation to a specific city* (Popescu, 2007). These refer to previous experiences, movies, news, advertisements, access to information, climate, prices, friends or citizens' views.

Addressing issues of design and organization of cities, regions or nations, urban marketing, also known as strategic urban marketing (Kotler, 1993), requires a design that meets the needs of a community's main constituent groups (citizens, workers and companies, visitors, new traders and investors) that have an interest in urban development and are, from this perspective, target markets of marketing activities (Kotler, 2001).

Promoting the values and image of a place so that potential users become aware of its advantages is a core activity of urban marketing, while urban marketing becomes a tool for managing urban space and creates a conceptual and theoretical framework for the urban brand, which projects into the urban image. It is estimated that urban marketing achieves its

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purpose when the community is satisfied with the urban and socio-economic environment and when visitors and investors' expectations are met.

In this context, Pitești is a city that sells itself through *tangible attributes* such as physical infrastructure, public services, taxes, but also by promoting *intangible attributes* such as city values, feelings of citizens and visitors. Regarded as a *creative city* in the future (Suciu, 2010), Pitesti aims to align the dimensions of its development to the attributes of a commercial and industrial city, with an urban brand whose marketing communication is controlled by city authorities. (Kavaratzis, 2006).

In the last four decades, the Tulip Symphony has become an element of the city's image.

2. The Tulip Symphony, a symbol of the urban brand of Pitești

Each city distinguishes itself by certain physical, geographic, economic, and demographic traits, which give it a certain personality and set it apart from other urban settlements on the map of the country or even the world. All cities can be identified in a precise way, but not all have specific elements, an urban identity. *Urban identity* is a consistent set of features that is able to bear the same meaning for each inhabitant of the city (Brunet, Ferras, 1992) and is reflected mentally by a symbol that has been adopted and built in time by each generation and that ensures the consistency and continuity of life for that urban community (G. Dematteis, 1994).

A strong urban brand shapes the personality of a city through two key dimensions: material aspects, *perceived as hard by residents and tourists* (infrastructure, taxes, expenses) and intangible aspects, which are *perceived as soft by population* (mentality, art, culture, health), both dimensions serving to prove the value of resources and the quality of life (Popescu, 2007). Any city brand presents the advantages and unique features that set it apart in the current marketing environment.

City branding assumes that there is already an image (positive or negative) to be developed or changed. The image of the city is perceived subjectively and cannot be dissociated from the object it represents - once there's an image, it is responsible for people's perceptions (Cretu, 2010). An urban brand is based on information about the city, tourist perceptions, and ratings of other cities and is created with the aim of promoting a particular city.

The elements of an urban brand are its internal climate, historic image, attractions, culture, social factors, and the separation of political factors (Tai-lok, 2008), but creating an urban brand involves adding an emotional element to the image of the city through a positive impact on a significant number of people with different levels of education, from different social groups, on residents, tourists, entrepreneurs, investors.

Pitești is located 100 km from the Romanian capital, with a relatively well-represented industry, with a positive impact on regional development, with great potential for business, and an educated, medium income population. The City Hall of Pitești included a program for creating local brands in its post-accession development strategy. Among the items associated with the image of Pitesti, flowers (tulips in particular) became a symbol that is frequently recalled by residents and visitors of the city. In 2007, the Tulip Symphony was identified by 55% of citizens as a defining element of the city.

Since its first edition, the Tulip Symphony has become a venue for flower growers and a symbol of the city, offered by local administration to beauty lovers in the country and around the world.

Organized for the first time in 1978, the event is held annually each spring. The history of the Tulip Symphony can be accessed on <http://www.simfonialelelor-pitesti.ro/>, a website created in 2007 and on which the Tulip Symphony was broadcast live since 2008 using 5 surveillance cameras placed in vantage points.

The Tulip Symphony is registered at OSIM under number 102 211 since 2009 as a combined brand (name and color graphic element), ensuring its worldwide uniqueness. Designer Dan Pavel designed The Tulip Symphony logo in 2007 as a project for the master thesis he defended at the National University of Arts in Bucharest and later presented to the City Hall of Pitești as a potential symbol of the city. Designing the logo required a comprehensive documentation in an effort to assess how the tulip was related to the city and how easily it would be acknowledged by residents. A statistical analysis of the values considered relevant by public and of the relationship between public perception and the city symbol was carried out before creating this design concept. In the analysis, the color purple was nominated by 90% of respondents as being related to Pitești. The first written mention of Pitesti on 20th of May 1388 was reflected in the answers of only 2% of surveyed subjects and the tulip became a symbol on the heraldic emblem of the city along with the caduceus (astrological symbol for trade), the oak leaf (Trivale Forest) and the eagle (a symbol that was borrowed from the old logo of the city between the two world wars).

3. Research design

The *decision problem* that became the starting point of our research was that in talking with friends, acquaintances, people in or outside the country, I noticed that many of them thought of Pitesti as the city of tulips, as a result of the Tulip Symphony event that had been organized every year since 1978.

The *objective of the study* was to investigate the opinion of visitors in general and of residents in particular about the Tulip Symphony event organized annually by the municipality of Pitesti, aiming to capture the image of the symbol of the city in the last years (2008-2014).

This paper is part of a larger independent project, initiated 7 years ago along with defining the coordinates of the post-accession strategy of Pitești for 2007-2013 and aims to collect data needed in building an effective urban brand for Pitești.

Our research method was a survey conducted before and during the event, from 11th to 13th of April 2014.

The *objectives of the research* on how Pitești residents think about the Tulip Symphony are:

1. determine the degree of knowledge and the perception on the event organized by the City of Pitesti;
2. determine the significance visitors place on the Tulip Symphony event;
3. identify the characteristics of the event (the building blocks of the image of the event);
4. identify the main tools for promoting the event that helped visitors receive useful information about the Tulip Symphony;
5. highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the event.

The *hypotheses* of the research, resulting from personal experience, are that the inhabitants of Pitești know about the Tulip Symphony event and consider it a part of the modern heritage of the city, defining it as a major event in their existence in recent years. I was also interested in finding out how interested the citizens of Pitești are in the events organized by the City Hall of Pitesti and I assumed that, out of all the events organized by the City Hall, they know and appreciate the Tulip Symphony best. These assessments are in part the result of how the City Hall involves in organizing outstanding events for the city.

Visitors believe the event is a tradition and that the floral exhibition is a distinctive element of the event.

Another hypothesis was that the event has a positive impact on the people of Pitești and its surroundings thanks to the promotional tools employed by City Hall (adds on local

radio and TV, posters, banners, online promotion), with posters and banners displayed in heavy traffic areas of the city being the most effective promotion tool.

The sample includes individuals who visited the exhibition organized in the Book House complex, the venue of the April 2014 Tulip Symphony. We used simple random sampling and an identical observation and survey unit: the individual.

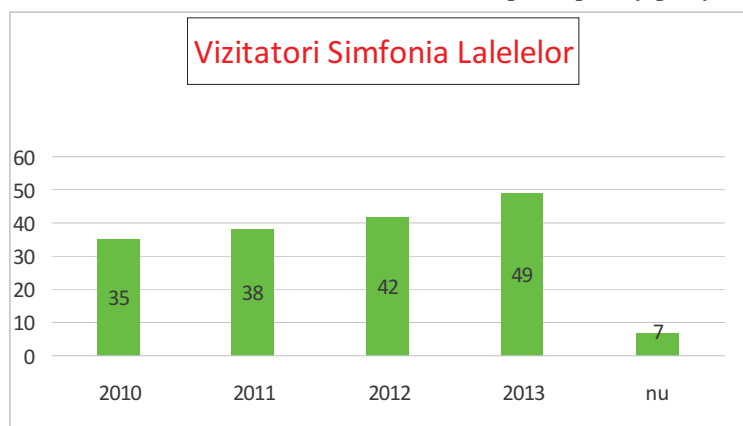
We employed a questionnaire consisting of 14 questions, both open and closed, as a data collection tool. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, occupation, education, residence).

4. Study findings

The first question sought to establish the degree of awareness of the Tulip Symphony event and asked respondents to name an event organized by the City Hall of Pitești. Most responses (90%) indicated the Tulip Symphony and the answer was considered normal since the questionnaire was applied during the event and while visiting the floral exhibition. Other answers nominated other events organized by the City Hall, such as the Pitești Autumn, etc. The results to this question indicated that the image of the Tulip Symphony has spontaneous notoriety, one of the image indicators.

When asked if they visited the exhibition in recent years (2010-2014), most visitors answered that they visited the exhibition in 2013 and 2012 and only 7 respondents said that they made their first visit in 2014 (Chart no. 1), showing a growing interest in the event in the last two years. This is due to the fact that people remember recent events and realize their permanence in the life of the city.

Chart no. 1 Number of visitors to the Tulip Symphony per year



The attributes respondents associate to it describe the image of the event. To get information about the personality of this urban brand and about advantages and disadvantages we used an open question and received various responses: *spring, flowers, beauty, tradition, cheerfulness, tulips, color, relaxation, art, passion, Pitești, tenderness*. Further research using focus groups could determine the attributes that should be maintained and developed in the process of creating a competitive urban brand.

Promotion is necessary for this event to be successful. The most effective means of promoting the 2014 Tulip Symphony were posters and banners placed in visible places in the city (39%), friends or acquaintances (25%), the city's promotion department (24%), and local TV and radio stations (12%). Online promotion was less used and was not reflected in the responses of interviewed visitors.

The intensity of the event's image is another indicator, as all respondents appreciated the Tulip Symphony and there were no adverse responses; this indicates that the event is well organized and is perceived positively by all respondents.

We wanted to get the visitors' feedback regarding event organization and the answers were distributed as follows:

Table no. 1 Distribution of feedback regarding event organization

Qualification for organizing the event	No. of people
Very well	15
Well	30
Satisfactory	12
Poor	2
Very poor	1

75% of visitors appreciated the organization of the event, while 5% of visitors gave negative qualifications, demonstrating that citizens have high expectations of the local public administration.

Another question sought to identify the characteristics of the Tulip Symphony as defined by visitors, offering respondents with three possible replies. The hierarchy of responses was as follows:

Table no. 2. Identifying the characteristics of the Tulip Symphony

Characteristic	No. of answers
Floral exhibition	54
Pitești trademark	48
Traditional event of the city	44
Socio-cultural event	14
Touristic event	14
Commercial event	7

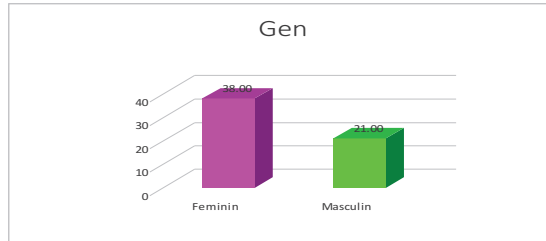
Based on information gathered we managed to define the features of the event, as follows: floral exhibition, emblem of the city and traditional event. These features will be developed and refined during a future program of urban marketing.

Respondents had to pick a strength and a weakness of the event. The analysis of these responses surfaced strengths such as: Tulip Symphony has become a traditional event of Pitești; it is an emblem of Pitești; it is a commercial event; the presence of tulips in green spaces in the city center. These assets can be further developed and are the starting point of future strategies for developing the urban brand of Pitești.

Some weaknesses of the Tulip Symphony mentioned by respondents are: unfavorable time during the event (rain); the 2014 parade was hampered by adverse weather; there were fewer tulips compared to previous years; higher prices for flowers displayed for sale; lack of parking spots; monotonous display of the exhibition; trite arrangements and plants/flowers; uncivilized, Balkanic, cheap trade; lack of tulips in the successful arrangements.

The study results highlight the socio-demographic characteristics of people who visited the exhibition and answered the questionnaire. Thus, 38 women (64%) and only 21 men (36%) agreed to answer questions; this is due to the fact that women are more interested in flowers and are responsible for making purchases (Chart no. 1).

Chart no. 1 Sample structure by gender



Regarding the structure of the sample by age, 40% of visitors were aged 26-40 years, 30% were aged 18-25, while 3-5% were children and old people (Chart no. 2).

Chart no. 2 Sample structure by age

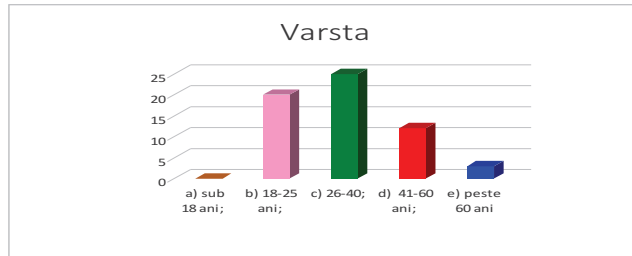
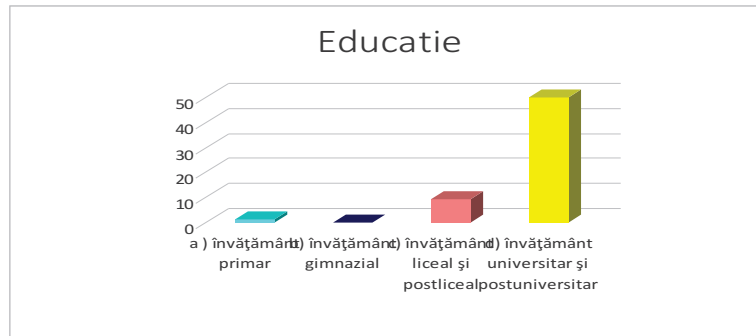
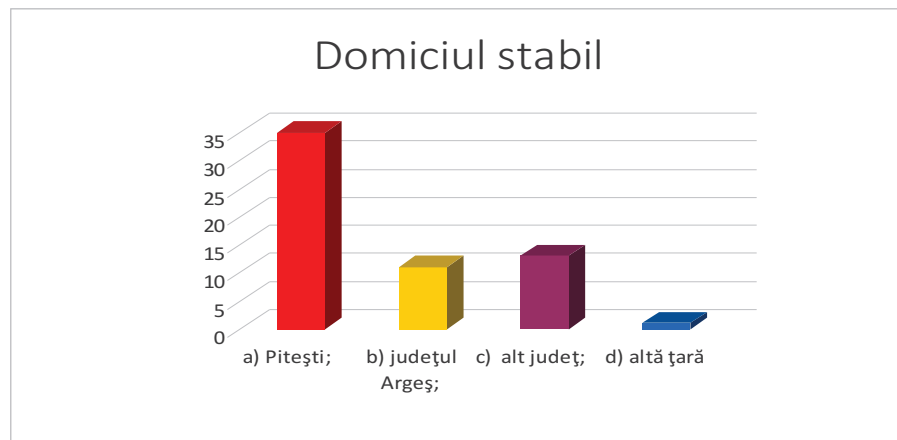


Chart no. 3 Sample structure by education



The distribution by level of education shows that people with higher education prevail in the sample (83%), indicating that people who visited the exhibition and wanted to answer questions have above average education.

Chart no. 4 Sample structure by residence



Regarding the respondents' address, visitors from Pitești are predominant in the sample, showing that especially residents of Pitești visited the floral exhibition.

Limitations

This study is exploratory in nature, being a pilot study, it doesn't allow the extrapolation of data on the analysed community and needs refining the research methodology following the integration of results by adding new objectives and relevant assumptions on a representative sample of the community that can contribute to designing the urban brand of Pitești by future community development strategies.

Conclusions

The following conclusions emerged from the analysis:

- The city of Pitești is seen as a commercial, modern city, with potential to become a creative city in the economy of the 2020's;
- Pitești is perceived as a city with locally known events, with an image of a city of flowers;
- Pitești can become a destination for employment, industry, and attractions offered by various events;
- The brand of the city involves ideas and ways to determine the involvement of the entire community to build an image of the city they want to live, work and invest in.

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