The Branding Power of Szeklerland. Online Place Branding Tendencies and Identity-Forming Efforts in Szeklerland

Zsolt BARBÓCZ

Corvinus University from Budapest

Budapest, Hungary

e-mail: barbocz.zsolt@gmail.com

Abstract: Destination branding has always been a complex question. This is especially true if we are talking about Szeklerland as a historical, cultural, and ethnic region, which can be defined in the easiest way through Covasna, Harghita, and Mureş counties of Romania. A well-structured brand in a region can help with its economic development and search for identity, so it is worth looking into branding activities in the region. Despite Szeklerland's strong identity and reputation, the discourse is extremely divided between Romanian and Hungarian people. There are plenty of brand owners in the region without central management and coherence. There are plenty of amateur and corporate initiatives that are generally poorly organized and serve individual economic purposes. In addition, politicians also play an active role in forming these processes. Although the regional and tourism development strategies of the counties of Szeklerland are similar, and it can be said that the stakeholders are open to the cooperation between the three counties, there were only partial results of regional-level collaboration. The paper follows the activities of online promotional initiatives about Szeklerland and the larger territorial units influencing the region, such as Romania and Transylvania, and the branding narratives created during them.

Keywords: destination marketing, branding, destination image, Szeklerland, identity

Introduction

One of the most important determinants of the globalized world is competition between countries. As a result of this competition, there was a need to shape the image of areas and regions. A well-structured identity, brand, the regulation of these, awareness, and authentic positioning can play a key role in the economic, tourism, and cultural development of a region. Nowadays, it is no longer enough

to rely on the image based on the historical past and the national culture, but conscious campaigns and image-building processes are also needed (Törőcsik–Somogyi, 2009). Decreasing travel costs, increasing purchasing power, the multiplicity of geographical locations and their similarities, and international investment have increasingly created a demand for a well-structured brand. Failure to find distinctive features and create unique country and nation images can have serious consequences (Anholt, 2005).

In the future, local brands, such as city, region, or country brands, may play an important role. Developing and supporting them can be a logical and growing expectation on the part of the local administration, civil society, and the private sector (Papp-Váry, 2019b). However, it is questionable what level of segmentation can work effectively in specific countries. From Romania's point of view, the question of whether it is necessary to promote smaller historical regions such as Szeklerland is also justified, or it can be called a success if the larger regions (Transylvania, Moldova, etc.) can become attractive tourist and investor destinations. According to Kádár, "the country brand influences the regions, settlements, but vice versa, a settlement or region can represent the country, it can bring added value to the country brand. It would be reasonable to develop regional and local plans related to the strategic plan, to allocate resources to them" (Kádár, 2013: 22). To get a clearer picture, it is worth examining the image-forming activities of Romania, Transylvania, and Szeklerland and their online representations.

In general, the country brand is shaped centrally by the government and, within it, by the ministries and agencies responsible for tourism, but there may be regions that develop their own image rather than being integrated into the national campaign (Papadopoulos–Heslop, 2002). In the case of Szeklerland, it can be said that the actors involved in the case try to highlight and build on the beauty of the landscape, the elements of local intellectual and built culture, and (folk) traditions, but there is no prominent motive, a well-defined positioning. There are some attempts to attract investors, but these are short-term recommendations rather than long-term strategies.

If regions do not build up a definite image, stereotypes will dominate, and they will determine the mentality of the recipients (Papadopoulos–Heslop, 2002). In the case of Szeklerland, this is perhaps the most decisive argument for creating a good brand image as both the public living in other regions of Romania and the Hungarian public associate a lot of stereotypes with this region. For Romanian people, it may be an unknown, hostile, but, in any case, a disruptive region, while for the Hungarians in Hungary this region is often accompanied by the image of archaic culture and romantic landscape as well as the image of backwardness. Szeklerland may be a lesser-known region in other countries, which may have become known in recent years through aspirations for autonomy. It would be worthwhile to carry out further research in order to

get a more accurate picture of how well Szeklerland is known in the world and what people associate with it.

In destination branding, the product you want to sell is the area itself, the place. The main goal of branding is the successful operation of the region and that the people living there can live in the highest possible living conditions economically, culturally, community-wise, and ecologically alike (Piskóti, 2017). Territorial branding involves a complex range of services and products that is complemented by cultural features and natural resources. The difficulties come from the fact that they have a lot of brand owners, and there is no single target group to whom they could be sold. The customer base is extremely heterogeneous. Political expertise in this area is useful so that proposals and provisions can be made that comply with all regulations. Regions need to communicate clearly and in an organized way with the world in order to influence public opinion. To do this, it is essential to create a discourse between the (local) government, the business sector, and civil society that can make this happen. It may be necessary to create new institutions and structures so that this behaviour can become sustainable (Anholt, 2008). This process is unique in each case, and there is no universal toolkit.

A special type of regional branding is country branding. A well-thought-out and designed brand can build the image of the country, creating a central idea on which to base movements promoting tourism, investment, and exports, thus gaining greater respect in the eyes of partners, competitors, and residents (Popescu–Corboş, 2010). Recognition of the role of the country brand needs serious steps. In many places around the world, “country image centres”, “country brand councils”, and similar initiatives have been launched with the common goal of positioning countries. One of the basic requirements of this was the creation of a unified brand strategy and the coordination of messages and images about the country. According to Papp-Váry (2019b), brand is a subjective state that can be influenced by the branding process. Effective and successful branding is based on well-organized marketing communications, advertising, public relations activities, and integrated communications, all of which help to spread a central message among relevant target groups. If this process is successful, the brand will be able to fulfil its functions of identification, orientation, trust, competence, and image. If these features work, the brand will provide quick and expressive identification, becoming able to give orientation about itself in the world through positioning, thereby building itself a reputation and respect that can build trust in the eyes of consumers (Papp-Váry, 2019a).

Destination marketing and its structure are mostly made up of the traditions characteristic of the region, the history of the region, the events that took place there, and the gastronomy, which strongly define the brand culture. The brand structure can be inferred from the internal structure, infrastructure, integrity of the area, reliability, and honesty in general. The logo or various symbols can be closely

associated with the brand name to help make it easier to identify. In some cases, you may need to rethink these when you are working on the brand strategy (Papp-Váry, 2019a). However, places do not gain suddenly a new identity from a new slogan or a spectacular logo. These elements can go a long way in helping the strategy, but they cannot stand on their own. Brand includes not only these but also various economic, political, and socio-psychological factors (Kavaratzis–Ashworth, 2005).

The complexity of the country brand is perhaps best summed up by Simon Anholt's (2007) nation brand hexagon. These hexagons are defined by the following dimensions: tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people. There were several types of attempts to measure the country brand, ranked by initiatives such as Anholt-GfK, FutureBrand, or Bloom Consulting.¹

Methodology

During the research, I examined the regional branding tendencies of Szeklerland in a complex way with methods that included interviews and observation (case studies). During my research, I observed the activities of the media shaping the image, and I conducted interviews with the persons shaping or supervising the image. I used the method of content analysis during the examination of press materials, advertisements, and website forms published and communicated by institutions and organizations. Our everyday lives are defined by the stories that surround us. According to Mitev Ariel (2006), we perceive our lives as stories, and through these we can relive events. The narrative technique is basically a qualitative research method. The narrative-based methodology probably avoids our attention because we consider storytelling around us to be natural. The practical aspects of marketing and advertising often build on storytelling in brand building, or in myth creation. Narratology has grown into a multidisciplinary discipline in recent decades, where not only structuralist analysis but also the interpretation of narratives is at the centre. In contrast to the paradigmatic, scientific approach, according to the narrative approach, people basically live through stories, pass them on, and their world consists of stories. Instead of the logical proof and testability of scientific theories, the stories are judged based on their reality and viability. Instead of hypotheses, the focus is on interpretations. Getting to know the world develops through stories instead of speculative models. The narrative paradigm also allows you to use concepts such as feelings, images, time, and perspective (Mitev, 2006). These factors may help to analyse branding.

Successful branding requires dialogue with people and creating stories that connect the product to the consumer. In many cases, these stories are based

1 For theoretical background and conceptualization of brand identity construction, see also: Tőkés, 2020.

on general motives of consumer behaviour, thus creating myths. Narrative interviews can capture different elements of consumer stories, the relationship between brand and consumer. The purpose of branding is to create an authentic story. “According to the meaning-based approach, consumers attach different meanings to advertisements as a result of personal interests and the interpretation of advertisements in cultural contexts” (Mitev, 2006: 37). A narrative approach is a philosophy that can place a set of methodologies in marketing and additional management sciences in a new context. With this method, we can examine the problems in question from a more human point of view and get practical results through them (Mitev, 2006).

The Internet is an inexhaustible source of data. In addition, much of the content produced by users is freely available, so they can strongly influence the image of regions. I believe that mapping and presenting all aspirations in the absence of time and space is not only impractical but also unreasonable and would result in a fragmented picture that would lead us away from the objectives of the paper. Although regional branding narratives are extremely unique and fragmented, there is a relatively generally accepted, stereotypical image of regions that is presented in these campaigns.

I have investigated several initiatives in order to get a comprehensive picture about Szeklerland narratives created for different purposes. Among the initiatives, I tried to highlight the best-known and most popular projects, but these are difficult to define and are not based on objective metrics. That is why I tried to make my selection as diverse as possible so as to include both Romanian (e.g. Explore the Carpathian Garden) and Hungarian (e.g. Szeklerland – Unlimited Experience) state initiatives, political party initiatives (e.g. Transylvania NOW), economic sector initiatives (e.g. Transylvania Beyond), tourism promotions, business promotions (e.g. Investing in Szeklerland... where everyone wins), amateur promotions (e.g. YouTube channels, videos), projects that focus on people, and projects that focus on natural environment. I mainly analysed the online appearances, social media presence, websites, and profiles of the initiatives. In the case of the counties, I also examined the various strategic plans and conducted interviews with stakeholders (e.g. one of the public relations specialists at *Visit Covasna*). Although the content examined does not exhaust the topic, I wanted to illustrate the chaotic branding processes present in the region through these.

Regional Branding Efforts in Szeklerland

Szeklerland is in the central part of Romania, in the south-eastern part of Transylvania and consists of the historical regions called Aranyosszék, Csíkszék, Háromszék, Marosszék, and Udvarhelyszék. Today, Harghita, Covasna, and Mureş

counties are mostly considered as Szeklerland, but the county boundaries do not fully correspond to the historical boundaries of the region. According to Alpár Horváth (2010), there are different regional development regions in Romania created by the country's leadership. The development regions thus created have neither a well-described identity nor socio-economic or territorial cohesion. Szeklerland, for example, is located in the Central region, of which a significant area of the former Saxon region is also part.

One of the most obvious features of Szeklerland is that it is home to the largest ethnic-national minority bloc in the Romanian state. The Szekler ethnic group living here is socialized in the Hungarian mother tongue and Hungarian culture. The unique identity of the region is nourished by the past and the ethnic myths, stories of origin, and legends passed on from there. These narratives are constantly being rebuilt in everyday discourses. However, myths and legends could be used as economic resources due to their strong ability to carry identity. This initiative can play a decisive role not only in identity formation but also in ethnic tourism (see: Horváth, 2010; Jakab–Vajda, 2018). The potential in this was recognized and exploited by *Székelyföldi Legendárium* (Legends of Szeklerland).²

In the following, I will present how Szeklerland is represented in branding campaigns about larger regions (Romania, Transylvania), and I will describe in detail the branding activities, strategies, and initiatives operating in the counties of Szeklerland.

The ongoing Romanian-level country brand campaign, *Explore the Carpathian Garden*, initiated and implemented by the Romanian Ministry of Tourism, does not refer in any way to Szeklerland as a region. It does not appear in the campaign in almost any form. The only element connected to Szeklerland is the Stuffed Cabbage Festival in Praid. Although the Transylvanian region is described as a multicultural environment, it makes no reference to the Szeklers as a minority ethnic group, while Țara Moșilor and the *moși* do appear. In addition, in the county division, Covasna and Mureș counties are highlighted from the alphabetical order and are at the end of the list. (This is also true for Bihor, Cluj, Sălaj, and Satu Mare counties.)

If we examine the initiatives at the Transylvanian level, we can already encounter the mention of Szeklerland more often. The region regularly appears on the *Transylvania NOW* website, initiated and implemented by School Foundation,³ which is a foundation initiated by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania.⁴ In the news section, they often write about Szekler people and their success. On this page, there is an article specifically about this

2 *Székelyföldi Legendárium* is a traditional and value-saving initiative, within the framework of which Szekler legends have been reworked into various forms of expression such as cartoons, maps, and board games.

3 Iskola Alapítvány/Fundația pentru Școală.

4 Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség/Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România.

region: *The History of Székelyföld: It's Complicated*. The article highlights that nothing is known about the Szeklers living in the area in the Anglo-Saxon world. (Not to mention that the area does not have an English name. It is usually referred to as *Székelyföld* 'Székelyland', but this is far from the English pronunciation. The term Szeklerland often occurs, but it is also closer to the Saxon/German language.) The *Transylvania Beyond* campaign, created by Heraldist & Wondermarks, also mentions Szeklerland as a tourist destination, which roughly covers the three counties already mentioned.

According to Horváth (2010), it is difficult to maintain destination marketing and place marketing based on an entrepreneurial initiative alone; therefore, it is necessary to be managed by the state. In Romania, on the other hand, there are no tourist regions. The strategies of the development regions already explicitly include tourism development measures, but there are no larger tourist regions with their own image; we can only talk about tourist zones or districts, the sole purpose of which is to coordinate infrastructural developments.

As we can see in the development strategies, the public/political discourse of the leaders of Hungarian minority in Romania strongly supports the identity-building initiatives developed as a result of the territorial entity living in Mureș, Harghita, and Covasna counties. In the following, I will present these initiatives.

Harghita County

In 2009, Harghita County established a tourism development strategy⁵ with the help of Aquaprofit Consulting SRL, which is an independent consulting and investment company. The rationale for the strategy was that this initiative was needed because the European Union requires different levels of government to set up a long-term strategy about their ideas and opportunities. In 2015, the Visit Harghita organization was established.

Based on the situation analysis of Aquaprofit Consulting (2009), active tourism, heritage tourism, and medical tourism are most prevalent in Harghita County, and the strategy suggests that these should play a central role in the branding process. At the same time, they mention village tourism, event and festival tourism as a potential development opportunity. During the formulation of the strategy, Covasna and Mureș counties are marked as a competition, mainly due to the presence of Hungarian tourists.

According to Harghita County Tourism Development Strategy, as a long-term goal, Harghita County, together with Covasna, wants to become one of the

5 Harghita County Tourism Development Strategy, Aquaprofit Consulting, 2009. http://elemzo.hargitamegy.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Hargita_megye_turizmusfejlesztesi_strategiaja.pdf.

country's key destinations, with unique active and ecotourism, spa tourism, cultural tourism, and rural tourism. In this strategy, Mureş County only appears in the development strategic guidelines. The possibility of Szeklerland as a unified tourist region, based on the marketing plan created jointly by the three counties, is also formulated here. The programme includes the creation of thematic routes to castles and mansions. This idea is also being implemented in Covasna County within the framework of the *Land of Mansions*⁶ initiative; however, it does not extend to Harghita County.

The issue of Szeklerland as a unified region will play an important role in the strategy.

This is necessary because Harghita County has no tangible identity in the imagination of either foreign tourists or tourists from Hungary. Szeklerland, on the other hand, is a historical territorial unit whose roots go back to the Middle Ages, to the time of the quasi-independent Szekler division of the Kingdom of Buda, its population has a very strong local identity, and its ethnic characteristics increase the region's attractiveness in many cases. (Aquadprofit Consulting, 2009: 263)

Covasna County

In Covasna County, tourism was seen in 2015 as a tool to increase rural employment. The county has an integrated tourism human resource development strategy. In this strategy, the goal is to increase rural employment. It was commissioned by Covasna County Council through OTP Consulting Romania. No strategy for the development of the county's tourism is available on the county's website. The site⁷ mentions a strategy whose aim is to create a realistic vision that can add value to locals and contribute to the growth of prosperity as well as meets the national tourism strategy.

The Potsa plan⁸ (Covasna County Development Strategy 2015–2020) shows that although there are fewer accommodation units in Covasna County than in Harghita and Mureş counties, this county has the highest percentage of tourism revenue. The plan concludes that the greatest potential is in balneotherapy and cultural tourism. The goal of OTP Consulting's strategy is to set the county as an example to follow by being able to implement a rural tourism development that can increase employment, entrepreneurship, and the quality of human resources

6 In Hungarian: *Kúriák földje*.

7 <https://www.kvmt.ro/strategia-de-dezvoltare-a-turismului/>.

8 https://www.kvmt.ro/_f/jelentesek_tanulmanyok/Anexa_Planul%20Potsa_Strategie_Covasna.pdf.

(OTP Consulting, 2015). Proposals for developments in tourism strategy include the use of balneary and therapeutic resources, including the development of spa and wellness tourism, the assessment of ethnographic markers for cultural tourism, and the rehabilitation of related sites. Local festivals can also be a strong tourist attraction. One of the key aspects of marketing activities is the development of image elements and institutionalized cooperation in the field of advertising and destination marketing (OTP Consulting, 2015). A great example of this is the *Visit Covasna* initiative. *Visit Covasna* is a project initiated by the Covasna County Tourism Association, which was created by Covasna County Council, the city council of Covasna and of Sfântu Gheorghe.

Mureş County

According to the Mureş County Development Plan⁹ issued by Mureş County Council for the period of 2014–2020, the main forms of tourism in the county are cultural and spa tourism, and agro tourism deserves special attention. Among the destinations, mediaeval castles, churches, built heritage, spas, and natural phenomena and reserves are highlighted. The county is also rich in mineral waters, natural values, cultural, artistic, and folk heritage. In addition to green tourism, niche tourism became central in Mureş County during the period as the Transylvanian Motor Ring was completed. Unlike the other two counties, religious, conference, railway, and urban tourism are important elements here. The strategy plan outlines the development of a new tourism strategy for the period of 2020–2030, which will be able to create a market advantage over the competitors.

According to the annex¹⁰ to the plan, it is worth creating smaller geographically connected territorial units to increase the efficiency of management, and groupings within the field of tourism. In the target period, according to the strategy, the county council wants to pay attention to increasing the visibility of the county, both domestically and abroad, as well as the number of tourists. This could be achieved through various tourism packages, cooperation with neighbouring counties, involvement of experts, appearance on tourism platforms, branding, development of information networks, distribution of promotional materials, and creation of a tourism portal. In the meantime, the *Visit Mureş* initiative has also been set up. *Visit Mureş* was initiated by Asociația Visit Mureş Egysület, which was established by Mureş County Council, Salvamont-Salvaspeo Mureş County Public Service, and Mureş County Museum.

9 http://www.cjmures.ro/Hotariri/Hot2014/anexa_hot107_2014.pdf.

10 http://www.cjmures.ro/Programe_actiuni/Programare2014_2020/4_Strategia.pdf.

Conclusions

In summary, Szeklerland has great potential both economically and in terms of tourism. The materials presented in the article point out that Szeklerland tries to carry out various branding activities which mainly build the image of tourism. Although the region is barely visible in national campaigns (it does not appear independently), Szeklerland can already be discovered in Transylvanian campaigns.

Regarding the branding of the region, it is fortunate that the Szeklers have a very strong sense of identity and are proud of their values. It was able to create a well-known and popular brand personality. Szeklers already have a strong national brand, and their stereotypical personality also carries a lot of brand marks, which also affects the image of Szeklerland. The region has a well-defined primary target group, which consists mainly of Hungarian tourists.

As the writers of the Harghita County Strategy put it:

Despite the fact that the ‘Szekler Region’ is only a political project for the members of the Hungarian communities in Romania, based on the tangible and intangible cultural and historical heritage and on territorial identity, Szeklerland can develop a tourism strategy that, while respecting the Romanian legislation and taking advantage of the region’s own values, it is integrated into the list of the country’s tourist offers with its territorial peculiarities. This aspect is fully in line with the basic objectives of European development policies, thus considering Europe’s cultural diversity and sustainable development.¹¹ (Aquaprofit Consulting, 2009: 51)

Destination branding processes have an extremely large impact on natural resources. The natural environment, the landscape, the flora and fauna play a central role in each initiative. The Szeklers are strongly connected to their typical gastronomy and cuisine, which also hides a lot of destination marketing opportunities. At gastronomic festivals, this can unfold freely, but it becomes an important factor even during simpler tourist occasions. In my opinion, pálinka (which is a hard-fruit liquor, mostly from plum) could be also a powerful product of Szeklerland; so, in addition to being able to become a tourist-organizing element, it could also grow into a significant export product under proper management. At the same time, the idea of utilizing mineral water, on which a brand has already been built, often returns.

In addition to the natural treasures, Szeklerland is rich in cultural heritage and traditions, which play an important role in the people’s sense of identity. Legends,

11 Harghita County Tourism Development Strategy, Aquaprofit Consulting, 2009, p. 51. http://elemzo.hargitamegye.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Hargita_megye_turizmusfejlesztesi_strategiaja.pdf.

myths known by the people can define the storytelling of the region, and there are some projects which have already been built for these. Thanks to the archaic way of life, the countryside can grow into a centre of rural tourism as elements of traditional way of life, crafts, and a lifestyle close to nature have survived to this day. The cultural heritage of Szeklerland, the experience of the local authentic way of life, has become extremely popular among tourists. Tourists are looking for individual, personalized travel experiences and interactions. At the same time, short-term vacations have begun to spread. Szeklerland offers a great opportunity to experience an authentic lifestyle through personalized journeys.

Although most campaigns present Transylvania and Szeklerland as a multicultural region, strategic steps are rarely built on this multiculturalism. Branding initiatives usually communicate their own narrative about this region, so Hungarian initiatives present a Hungarian-centric, while Romanian projects present a Romanian-centric interpretation of the region. The difficulty of cultural differences is also reflected in language disadvantages. Most initiatives usually communicate with their target audience in one, sometimes two languages, and only exceptional projects provide information in Romanian, English, and Hungarian. Initiatives for the area do not have easily identifiable image elements and design. The projects are well structured individually, but there is no institution that would manage the entire Szeklerland region.

Finally, based on the examined content, it can be said that many people are interested in the cultural heritage, folk traditions, and tourist offer of Szeklerland. The counties are open for cooperation with neighbouring counties; however, only Harghita County has published more specific ideas for cooperation. There is still a way of cooperation between Covasna and Harghita counties, but Mureş County usually misses out on this although – based on their strategic plans – they would be interested in a similar project. In terms of supply, all three counties are similar, so cooperation can be made easier, but it must not be forgotten that they are also in competition with each other.

As it is observed in the development strategy of several counties, there is a lack of complex tourism products and packages that could attract tourists with a well-organized offer. A jointly built Szeklerland image could help the efficiency and operation of these tourist packages.

In the case of Covasna County, there are the *Land of Mansions* and the *Land of Mineral Waters* initiatives. The problem with these two brands, in my opinion, is that they make it difficult to create a single well-known positioning that can span the entire region. Nevertheless, these are initiatives that would be worthwhile to extend to the whole of Szeklerland and could serve as a great basis for collaboration as the related tourism branches play a central role in all three counties. There are plenty of projects that can be linked to the regional brand of Szeklerland. They are already present in such quantities that they are

difficult to maintain, and there are plenty of incomplete initiatives. It would be worth concentrating resources, thus creating an initiative that is able to gather and communicate information much more efficiently and that can also reach the target group more easily.

As we are talking about a peripheral European region, strong branding activities are needed for the region's improvement. Szeklerland has a huge cultural heritage, which can provide a great foundation for destination branding activities. Recently, a lot of initiatives have been launched to take advantage of these, which may even be able to develop the region.

References

- Anholt, Simon. (2005). *Brand New Justice – How Branding Places and Products Can Help the Developing World*. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann. http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/nation_branding/Brand_Name_Products_Brand_New_Justice_How_Branding_Places_And_Products_Can_Help_The_Developing_Wo.pdf (last accessed: 5 February 2020).
- (2007). *Competitive Identity – The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- (2008). Place Branding: Is It Marketing, or Isn't It? *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 4: 1–6. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000088.pdf> (last accessed: 4 April 2020).
- Aquaprofit Consulting Kft. (2009). *Hargita Megye Turizmusfejlesztési Stratégiája*. [Harghita County Tourism Development Strategy]. Miercurea Ciuc: Harghita County Council. http://elemzo.hargitamegye.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Hargita_megye_turizmusfejlesztési_strategiaja.pdf (last accessed: 23 May 2020).
- Hargita Megye Tanácsa. (2016). *Hargita megye Általános Fejlesztési Stratégiája: 2015–2020-as periódusra* [Harghita County General Development Strategy for the period of 2015–2020]. http://elemzo.hargitamegye.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Hargita_megye_Általános_Fejlesztési_Stratégiaja_2015_2020_HU.pdf (last accessed: 23 May 2020).
- Horváth, Alpár. (2010). Az etnicitás dilemmája a Székelyföld turizmusfejlesztésében [The Dilemma of Ethnicity in the Tourism Development of Szeklerland]. *Tér és Társadalom* 24(3): 147–162. <https://tet.rkk.hu/index.php/TeT/article/view/1333> (last accessed: 22 May 2020).
- Jakab Albert, Zsolt–Vajda, András. (2018). Örökség: etnicitás, regionális identitás és territorialitás [Patrimony: Ethnicity, Regional Identity, and Territoriality]. In: Jakab, Albert Zsolt–Vajda, András (eds.), *A néprajzi örökség új kontextusai*.

- Funkció, használat, értelmezés* [The New Contexts of Cultural Heritage: Function, Usage, Interpretation]. Cluj-Napoca: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, 7–28.
- Kádár, Magor. (2013). Az országmárkák értékelésének módszerei. Románia országmárkaértékének gyors elemzése [Methods for Evaluating Country Brands. Rapid Analysis of the Country Brand Value of Romania]. *Közgazdász Fórum* 16(5): 3–24. https://epa.oszk.hu/00300/00315/00106/pdf/EPA00315_kozgazdasz_2013_05_003-024.pdf (last accessed: 5. February 2020).
- Kavaratzis, Mihalis–Ashworth, G. J. (2005). City Branding: An Effective Assertion of Identity or a Transitory Marketing Trick? *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 96(5): 506–514 (last accessed: 8 April 2020).
- Mitev, Ariel Z. (2006). Végtelen történet: A narratív elemzés alkalmazhatósága a marketingkutatásban [Endless Story: The Applicability of Narrative Analysis in Marketing Research]. *Vezetéstudomány, Budapest Management Review* 37(10): 33–41.
- OTP Consulting, Romania. (2015). *Integrált turisztikai humán erőforrás-fejlesztési stratégia a vidéki foglalkoztatás növelése érdekében* [Integrated Tourism Human Resource Development Strategy to Increase Rural Employment]. Covasna County, Sfântu Gheorghe: Charta Print. https://www.kvmt.ro/_f/transparenta_decizionala/2016/01_strategie/Strategie_HU.pdf (last accessed: 23 May 2020).
- Papadopoulos, Nicolas–Heslop, Louise. (2002). Country Equity and Country Branding: Problems and Prospects. *Journal of Brand Management* 9(4): 294–314. <http://www.efos.unios.hr/makromarketing/wp-content/uploads/sites/132/2013/04/country-branding-seminar-1.pdf> (last accessed: 5 February 2020).
- Papp-Váry Árpád (2019a). *Országmárkázás – Versenyképes identitás és imázs teremtése* [Country Branding – Creating a Competitive Identity and Image]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- (2019b). Az országmárkázás korlátjai – 25 kritikus pont [Limitations of Country Branding – 25 Critical Points]. *Comitatus* 2019/Summer–Autumn. Pécs: MRTT, 179–190. http://www.papp-vary.hu/orszagmarkazas/Az_orszagmarkazas_korlatjai_25_kritikus_pont.pdf (last accessed: 5 February 2020).
- Piskóti, István. (2017). Desztinációk márkázása [Branding destinations]. In: Bauer, András–Kolos, Krisztina (eds.), *Márkamenedzsment* [Brand Management]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Popescu, Ruxandra-Irina–Corboș, Răzvan-Andrei. (2010). A Review of Strategic Options for Achieving a Country Brand for Romania. *Review of International Comparative Management* 11: 881–893. <http://rmci.ase.ro/no11vol5/10.pdf> (last accessed: 29 March 2020).

- Tőkés, Gyöngyvér Erika. (2020). Methodological Framework for the Analysis of Brand Identity Construction. *Journal of Media Research – Revista de Studii Media* 13: 22–40.
- Törőcsik, Mária–Somogyi, Zita. (2009). Az országmárkázás kérdései [Country Branding Issues]. *Marketing & Menedzsment* 43(2): 20–29. <https://journals.lib.pte.hu/index.php/mm/article/view/727/604> (last accessed: 5 February 2020).

Cite as:

- Barbócz, Zs. (2020). The Branding Power of Szeklerland. Online Place Branding Tendencies and Identity-Forming Efforts in Szeklerland. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Communicatio* 7: 143–156. DOI: 10.2478/auscom-2020-0010.