

THE IMAGE OF A CITY AS AN IMAGE OF COUNTRY – THE CITY OF TIMIȘOARA AND ITS NEW HISTORICAL OPPORTUNITY AS A EUROPEAN CULTURAL CAPITAL IN 2021

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Abstract : This study unveils some key elements regarding the topic of local and national image in the light of the fact that the City of Timisoara has won the competition for European Cultural Capital in the year of 2021. We develop here a short historical description upon some historical elements regarding the city of Timisoara and regarding the way in which this Romanian city has earned its symbol and its status during its own long history. Starting from this point we further examine the set of opportunities which the City of Timisoara has in order not only to consolidate its already historical positive image for the Central European space but also to build and to consolidate this positive image for the entire country in the light of the fact that the city will be the Europe's Cultural Capital in the year of 2021. In the end we analyze two distinct topics. On the one hand we underline the need to accelerate the rebuilding of the internal cultural infrastructure of the city in order to be prepared for the event. On the other hand we also examine the possibilities of building through the event from 2021 a regional identity for the entire border areas which are located near the city. This analysis is developed by considering the long multicultural tradition of the Banat region and not only of the City of Timisoara.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, Multiculturalism, Regional Identity, Country and City Image

Introduction This short paper tries to unveils the major possibilities for the City of Timisoara for not only an improvement of its image as a symbolic Central European City but also for improving the general image of the country in the year 2021, a year in which Timisoara will be the European Cultural Capital. The approach is built starting with an historical perspective and ending with an analysis about all that should be done in the city in order to capitalize the event in the most effective way possible.

A City and its History

We do not intend here de make an extensive historical analysis about the past of the City of Timisoara in terms of its technological, commercial and political achievements. However, what it is indeed sure is the fact that the past of city successfully paced it in a singular space within the general symbolic space of Central European. A city located at the political and symbolical border of the Western World, with a multicultural tremendous positive tradition, has earned recently the title of European Cultural Capital for the year 2021. In obtaining this title the history of the city, but also other contemporary aspects, have played, of course, a crucial role. Being a strong regional pole the City of Timisoara have today, among other positive aspects, its historically configured multicultural mentality together with all the advantages which come appear from this.

Also, another major role in winning the title, with all its implications, was, in our view, the fact that the City of Timisoara was the starting point of the Romanian revolution in 1989. Thus, the opportunity of being the European Cultural Capital in the year 2021 will be for Timisoara another chance of making history.

Building an Image for a City

But this chance will not come only for the city, and least not in our perspective. Winning the title could be, in our view, a tremendous chance to improve or to consolidate not only an image of a city but also an image of an entire country. In terms of PR techniques this process could be done by using an effect of positive amplification but this is only the theoretical dimension.

Beside any practical form of conceiving and making a proper PR promotion what is sure is the fact that for the City of Timisoara winning the title of European Cultural Capital for the year 2021 is a historical chance to promote not only its own image as city, and by doing so, its own image as an image of an entire country but, generally speaking, it also represents a chance to promote the image of an entire Euro regional area.

But which are the main advantages that could be extensively used by the City of Timisoara during the entire length of the year 2021 to consolidate its symbolic status and to further disseminate its positive dimensions, on various perspective, on the scale of an entire continent?

In what will follow we will try to disclose these positive elements for the City of Timisoara, elements which were historically obtained and deeply configured.

The first of these positive elements is in our view its geographical position of the city. This has in itself something symbolic because the geographical location of the City of Timisoara, and also historically speaking, is somewhere between a few different worlds if we can say so. On the one hand the geographical position of the city is located in the extremity of the country. Even more, this position of geographical and symbolical extremity was present during the entire history of the city. It marks a world of confluences and influences, a place where worlds come together in order to fusion and to grow. In some senses the City of Timisoara is located at the edge of the East, generally speaking, but also, in the same time, at the edge of Western World. Even today for many Romanians the City of Timisoara represents the most westerner city of the entire country. Just this position of confluences and absorption of different cultures and traditions make from the city a strong hub able to configure the identity of an entire European Region.

The second one is the city's multicultural heritage. We talked about this in some earlier of our studies and we do not feel here the need to repeat or to go into further details (Păcurar & Epure, 2014). What is sure about this is the fact that the multiculturalism of the city is a strong advantage not only from a general cultural perspective but from an economical one and, why not, political one. Only addition to what we already said about Timisoara's multicultural status and tradition is the fact that in the present, beside the traditional nationalities which always have lived in harmony with Romanians we can add today a few new nationalities such are the Italians and the Arabs. At this moment, of course, these nationalities are represented in the city in a relatively small number but they already showed a strong and positive will to be integrated. We think that this new ingredients to the ethnic mix of the city could have in the future a very positive role for consolidating and further developing its multicultural long and healthy tradition,

The third element comes for us in a logical order from the second one and we think that it could be reduced to the idea of *tolerance*. This has a tremendous positive impact not only on a cultural perspective but also on a commercial, economic and political one. And also this could be assumed has a model for other city not only from Romania but from the entire continent of Europe as well.

A distinct element which can also play a positive role in developing a good image for the city is represented by the whole history of premiers which the city has. This could include some technical firsts in specific fields and domains but also in some cultural aspects. Just like in the case of multiculturalism we do not intend here to enter in further details.

A possible fifth element, a one which is already visible for the city in the last years, it is represented by the enormous potential of the city to become a major commercial and technological hub for the entire Central Europe. This process is now only at the beginning but positive signs, many of them, already exist so the prospect is quite bright.

Finally, the sixth element which has the power to configure for the city a very strong and distinct identity is the fact that the city of Timisoara is the city where it started Romanian Revolution in the year 1989.

Cultural Infrastructure

After the joy of winning the title the academic, civil and cultural community of the city had become very aware of the fact that many things should be improved until the symbolic year of 2021. But what should be done in a concrete manner for the city.

First of all it should be significantly improved the general infrastructure of the city. In order to do this there are already some great projects but it remains to be seen how many of these plans will be properly developed in finished. We can give some examples of these projects (Ziua de Vest, 2016, no author, general article). These examples combine purposes of general infrastructure with element of pure cultural infrastructure. However, both of them have the capacity to consolidate the public perception on the city so both of them are equally important.

In terms of cultural infrastructure the City Hall has envisioned some key elements as are the restoration of old and valuable buildings or the construction of some new cultural locations in the city. In this context it is very important to mention the fact that the City of Timisoara has a large number of historical buildings, buildings which are valuable through their historical architecture and historical heritage. Here we can give some examples such are the Baroque Palace from Timisoara, a very distinct building through its architectural symbolic heritage. But the projects are many more and they have as their main target large operations of rehabilitation some old cultural buildings or other cultural symbols of the city. It remains to be seen in which measure for these projects the City of Timisoara will have or not a governmental financial and logistical support.

Regional Identity

By winning the title as European Cultural Capital the City of Timisoara has now not only the chance to improve the general image of the country but also to establish, we can say, a new, powerful and distinct identity for the entire local region. And by this we understand not only an area from Romania, the Banat County, but an entire cross border region, an area which could include Serbia and Hungary, in some of their closest parts, in the project. Even

more, starting from this it would become reasonable to expect some further developments in this line in the future. The Regional Identity, beyond its economic and commercial benefits will have a profound symbolic cultural value and will contribute to further consolidate multicultural cooperation and general development of the entire local and regional community on the long term of history.

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