

## CASE STUDY

# ALBA IULIA – BRANDING THE “OTHER CAPITAL” OF ROMANIA

Unlocking Identity and Heritage to Compete Globally



## Background

As a city often overlooked due to its modest population (just under 75,000), Alba Iulia has redefined what it means to be competitive on a global stage. It emerged as a pioneer by launching Romania's first official city brand and one of the earliest branding strategies in Europe, starting in 2015.

Positioned in the heart of Transylvania, Alba Iulia historically served as a capital through various eras – Roman, medieval, ecumenical, and royal. However, its vast cultural and historical assets had remained underutilized until the municipality took a strategic decision to brand the city as “The Other Capital” of Romania.

## The Branding Strategy

Rather than just a logo, Alba Iulia developed a full city identity strategy. The process involved:

- Recognizing the city's long-standing capital status over two millennia.
- Positioning the Alba Carolina Fortress—the largest in Romania—as a symbolic anchor.
- Crafting a narrative that highlighted multiple capital identities (Youth, Roman, Royal, Science, etc.).
- Leveraging EU heritage funding for fortress restoration.
- Celebrating major milestones like the 2018 Centenary of Romanian Unity, positioning the city as the cradle of national unity.

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“THE GREATEST CAPITAL YOU’VE  
NEVER HEARD OF”

“ROMANIA’S OTHER CAPITAL”

Brand Taglines



## Innovations and Firsts

Alba Iulia became known not just for heritage but for innovation thanks in part to its participation in URBACT's CityLogo project.

- First in SE Europe to have a World Bank strategic partnership.
- Introduced biofuel buses, free WiFi, smart tourism features, and a digital tourist welcome pack.
- Launched smart city initiatives well ahead of national peers.

## Benefits

- Received EU awards (Europa Nostra, EDEN).
- Tourist numbers exceeded 500,000 in 2018.
- Became a leading EU example in city marketing.
- Attracted external investment and visibility, despite its size.
- Boosted local pride and unified stakeholders across public and private sectors.

## Roles & Key Players

- Municipality-led initiative with support from EU funds and the World Bank.
- Strong leadership from city staff and political figures.
- Collaborative approach involving local tourism, business, and cultural institutions.

## Lessons for Other Cities

- A compelling story can outperform population size in global visibility.
- Heritage can be repositioned as a modern identity driver.
- Bold branding requires long-term political will and community involvement.
- Small cities can lead national innovation in branding and smart governance.

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