Work from Home: A Challenge for City Branding

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Abstract
We have always worked from home. Originally and historically, our work was carried out in the house, the perimeter of our houses, or in our household. Due to the progress of mechanics, steam and electricity power, we have separated the two places: the workplace from home place. With time passing, and due to other inventions and innovations – the phone, telecommunication on long-distance, rapid means of transportation just to name a few – more and more we have assigned to the work very specialized spaces, with all the necessary endowment. Still, there are even now few categories of work that are very suitable to be carried both out from home as well as from the office. Mainly the creative professions are more suitable for the work from home and, according to the professional disposition and organization policies and procedures, this may happen in a certain degree and organizational frame. Our paper aims to reveal the way residents, as stakeholders perceive and relate to the city itself in a new paradigm: working from home during a pandemic. The inhabitants perceive a city, basically, by two dimensions – work and life. Working from home during the pandemic imposes in front of the residents the mixture between these two places, these two dimensions of the city. How do the residents perceive the city in this new perspective? We expect the answer to this main question of the research to provide lessons to be wisely put into value in a city brand strategy, considering residents as significant stakeholders of the city. The detailed research questions – 1) How do the respondents define, characterize and react to the work from home?; 2) How do the respondents relate themselves to the city during the work from home in pandemic time? 3) How do city brands meet their expectations? – will lead us to identify the city inhabitants' attitude, opinion, and way of acting when their working conditions suddenly changed under the pressure of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, relating it to the city and city branding. Our research contributes to underlining the role of residents in city branding, challenging it to have a paradigm shift toward the residents.

Keywords
City branding; inhabitants; residents; stakeholders; work from home

Introduction

The option for working from home is a personal one, which is an agreement between the organization and its employees, according to procedures, schedules, free-willing, professional commitment, etc. But suddenly, globally and without any delay, the present pandemic has made us all face a new reality, to obey new rules and set up innovative procedures, to develop experience fears and feelings, to change our daily routine and behavior. Besides the pandemic itself, it was a consequence of it that burst

into our life: the work from home. Generally speaking, the work from home involved the employee and the organization and it is an option, a career choice, societally accepted. In this case, work from home was suddenly decided, conceptualized, formalized, put into practice and a lot of questions and issues have been and still are to be dealt with: how to define it as a trend, advantages, and challenges, impact on a person, family and city, considered like the environment of our day-to-day life.

The place branding activities have not been focused enough on the residents (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015) (Warnaby & Medway, 2015), as the relevant stakeholders of the city, the resources, and the main consumers of the city. For our research, we shall refer to the city as a place of work and live, meaning the way city fulfills the inhabitants' needs, expectations, and standards. Our paper aims to reveal the way residents, as stakeholders perceive and relate to the city itself in a new paradigm: working from home during a pandemic. The inhabitants perceive a city, basically, by two dimensions – work and life. Working from home during the pandemic imposes in front of the residents the mixture between these two places, these two dimensions of the city. How do the residents perceive the city in this new perspective? We expect the answer to this main question of the research to provide lessons to be wisely put into value in a city brand strategy, considering residents as significant stakeholders of the city. The detailed research questions – 1) How do the respondents define, characterize and react to the work from home?; 2) How do the respondents relate themselves to the city during the work from home in pandemic time? 3) How do city brands meet their expectations? – will lead us to identify the city inhabitants' attitude, opinion, and way of acting when their working conditions suddenly changed under the pressure of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, relating it to the city and city branding. We expect our research to contribute to underlining the role of residents in city branding. In the theoretical approach, we focus on the nowadays cities that have survived the centuries, from their first settlement, more or less in the medieval age. Their survival over the centuries proves the adaptation capacity and the knowledge of resource management, whatever these resources are. We refer to the European and North American cities, that have, in a certain measure, the same cultural background and strong social, economic, and political ties. We shall review the theory of city branding from the residents' perspective in the digital age. The third theoretical issue refers to the conceptual delimitation of what we generic name "work from home".

Cities and branding: a theoretical approach

Although the great majority of the population live in cities, the definition of the city is more and more difficult and each attempt reveals new elements that increase its complexity (Weber, 2013) (Wirth, 1934) (Park, 1925). Max Weber (2013) develops an elaborated attempt of defining the city, stating that it should be defined by more than one dimension, according to the economic purpose, culture, and social relations set up in this frame, not omitting the geographical and historical conditionalities. Wirth (1934, p. 1) refers to "the lack of sociological definition of the city" which would highlight "that while the city is the characteristic locus of urbanism, the urban mode of life is not confined to cities". Park (1925, p. 1) defines the city as "a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions" […] "it is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it, it is a product of nature and particularly of human nature".

For our research, we take into considerations all these points of view, but we consider that in present-day life, the city and citizens have developed an image of the city as the conjunction area between the objectivity of the quality of the urban environment and the subjectivity of the understanding and perception of the urban residents (Pacione, 2001, p. 396). Briefly, they develop a sense of "urban liveability", and "we must consider both the city on earth and city in mind" (Pacione, 2001, p. 396). This is the city the place brand refers to and this is what academics and practitioners of city branding have in mind when elaborating the strategy that must equally, ethically, impartially meet all the city stakeholders' expectations on the short, medium, and long term.

Sociologists (Jacob Larionescu, 2016) consider that certain cities have developed during their evolution a social and geographical segregation process. In the pre-industrial city, social segregation focuses on population and addresses the religious, ethnic and racial issues, whereas the geographical (residential) one refers to the distribution of the residence in the city perimeter (p. 37). For instance, in Bucharest, there is an Armenian district, established in the XVIII-XIX century. The ethnic content of the inhabitants has been diluted over the tine, but it is still and informally known as "Armeneasca". We would suggest even segregation by profession, crafts, or trades. There are sociologists (Jacob Larionescu, 2016, p. 27) that explain this economic segregation by the fact that the traders and craftsmen lived and worked in the same buildings, grouped by their occupation. There are certain districts, at least streets named according to the trade they developed: a street for the traders of silk (Matasari str.), another one for the traders of wool (Lanariei str.), flour (Fainari str.), and general agricultural products (Agricultori str.).

By the second part of the XIX century, when railways transportation boosted, the industrial city has emerged. It is equipped with a railway, including the city in the network of other cities passing through the same stage of development. New business facilities are erected in the city, near the railway stations: the warehouses and facilities for related business. Transportations contribute in a major way to the segregation of the city, separating the residential area from the industrial one (Jacob Larionescu, 2016, p. 30). The working class with low income was localized in the proximity of factories or near a public transportation cross-roads they afford, at the periphery. The lower-income categories of the inhabitants lived in agglomerated districts, in blocks of flats. The middle class and the liberal professions settled between the industrial core and the suburbs. Their income was higher and they afforded public transport from home to the office and back. The upper class lived in unifamilial houses in the city, to be close to the business area, as well in suburbs, far from the dynamic city, (Jacob Larionescu, 2016, p. 31) to enjoy the advantage of larger estates, parks, and houses.

The American city has some particularities: it is a new type of city, emerged from the beginning with transportations means, with an early sewer system, developed horizontally, without the boundaries of the medieval protection walls as in Europe enabling it an extensive development. The American dream is about a unifamilial house with a garden on an affordable reality in the suburbs or even out of the city. The

residential area was separated from the business or industrial one, situated mostly in the center of the city (Jacob Larionescu, 2016, pp. 51-53).

In the last decades of the last century, the cities turned to the post-industrial model, marked by deindustrialization, increasing globalization, new telecommunication technologies, the internet, and social media (Nilsson, 2015, p. 1). The post-industrial city has given up the industry and the large area where factories and plats were located, in favor of new housing districts. The "New Urbanism" is focused on the inward expansion of the city, not outward, as before (Nilsson, 2015). As working places, the post-industrial city is very flexible: the newly set up "post-industrial companies are located where people want to live" (p. 4). There is a new approach to the concepts of work, employment, and work conditions with an impact on the model of working from home: "some firms have no employees" (p. 4).

At the beginning of the millennium, Richard Florida published a book about "the creative city" - a place where "the creative class" to settle (Florida, 2002b). The profile of the creative class as a category of residents is: "fast-growing, highly educated, and well-paid segment of the workforce on whose efforts corporate profits and economic growth increasingly depend"; they work "in a wide variety of industries – from technology to entertainment, journalism to finance, high-end manufacturing to the arts. […] they value "creativity, individuality, difference and merit" (Florida, 2002a, p. 17). They work in the line of science, research, arts, high-tech, knowledge-intensive industries, legal services, professional services, business management (2002a, p. 18). The cities they settle in "have greater diversity and a higher level of quality of place" (2002a, p. 20). These "plug-and-play communities" in which everyone fit quickly – "somebody move into and put together a life or at least a facsimile of a life in a week" (2002a, p. 20) - offer opportunities, are supportive, and encourage people – residents – are preferred destinations for the creative class residents. These cities provide their residents "a solid mix of high-tech industry, plentiful outdoor amenities, and an older urban center whose rebirth has been fuelled in part by a combination of creativity and innovative technology, as well as lifestyle amenities" (p. 22).

More recent, Nordstrom and Schlingmann (2015, p. 15) highlight the "urban digital galaxy" As electricity transferred energy from one place to another facilitating our transport from home to factories, in the industrial age, the internet transfers information, allowing us to choose which place to belong to (2015, pp. 73, 106). Also here, referring to the city brand we meet the same issue of a multidisciplinary line of research, for which a unitary and unanimously accepted definition is rather difficult. But, synthetically, the city brand is a strategy for identifying and attracting new resources, along with preserving and conserving the existing ones, to ensure the optimal development of the city in accordance with the interests of all its stakeholders. One or another component of the strategy may prevail according to the phase targets. For example, Sibiu has wisely taken all the advantages and lessons of the European Capital of Culture 2007 to set up its branding strategy. Cluj may use the smart city as the leading component for the city branding strategy. Not to mention the cases of cities all around the world that have set up sustainable brands (Dinnie, 2011). Since 2005, Edinburgh adopted "`Edinburgh Inspiring Capital` brand promoting the city as a place to visit, invest, live, work and study" determining the city to become `an attack brand`

for Scotland", often having the leading position in the country promotion strategy (Wardrop, 2011, pp. 138-139). About Hague (Hulleman & Govers, 2011, p. 150), although well-known as "the legal capital of the world", a series of research have been conducted to find out if the unique promotion as international organization city host represents a strong enough core for the city branding. It was concluded that public diplomacy, place branding, and hospitality actors should work together in a much larger process of city branding (p. 156).

There are a few aspects to be considered about city branding. First, it is its "political" content (Anholt, 2010). Any city is led by a structure democratically elected from a series of political parties, doctrines, and leaders proposing their programs, views, and missions about the city's development. Anholt (2010, p. 12) emphasizes that city branding "is a robust and productive coalition between government, business, and civil society, as well as the creation of new institutions and structures to achieve and maintain [the branding] behavior". But the complexity of the city branding definition and function resides in its essential differentiation from other categories of brands: it has no owner, there is no contract between the residents and other stakeholders, and the city itself. Cities consist of a diversity of stakeholders and organizations involved in daily life and exert a certain degree of control over the city (Kavaratzis, 2009, p. 29). The relationship between the city and its stakeholder is based on the social contract that is "primarily about rights" (Anholt, 2003, p. 213). This is the paradigm we are going to discuss city branding and citizens through the lens of the work from home in a pandemic time.

The recent boost of the internet, digitalization, and virtual environment have imprinted upmost the city branding by "the 7 C`s of digital strategic place brand management: channels, clutter, community, chatter, communication, co-creation, and co-branding" (Hanna & Rowley, 2015, p. 85). The websites, social media, and "other types of digital presence" enrich and diversify the communication channels so much, that the city brand managers should thoroughly think about how to associate the message, the target group, and the communication channel to achieve the strategic goal (p. 91). The use of the mobile platforms facilitates the inhabitants/residents access to the information based on the user`s location, such as nearby facilities/services, transportation information, cultural events, etc. (Rethinking Strategic Place Branding in the Digital Age, p. 91). In this way, the city becomes more friendly to the residents.

Although city branding targets equally and equidistantly the stakeholders, the residents have not been concerned too much about the academics or professionals of place branding (Braun & Zenker, 2012) cited in (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015, p. 105). More recent papers concluded have led to this conclusion. In the case of Porto, the brand fitted the residents' "sense of place identity", but the strategy was focused most on tourists, and "not to reinforce citizens` place attachment" (Casais & Monteiro, 2019). In recent research conducted on 24 case studies about the city all around the world, Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019, p. 6) concluded that the city branding targeted more the tourists as stakeholders, undesirably impacting the "form and spirit" of the city which "acquired a meaning not necessarily according to the aspirations of city residents".

The residents may have various roles in place branding: they influence the branding with their characteristic and behavior, they are ambassadors of the brand, increasing the credibility of the communication, "as citizens and voters, who are instrumental in the political legitimization of place branding" (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013) cited in (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015, p. 105). We would add the residents' role as taxpayers and contributors to the different city income sources. The great mobility and fluency of the population from one place to another, the quick access to very every little corner of the world, irrespective of how far it is – just a click distance – enable the residents living in a place to work in another one, with important impact on fiscality both of the place of work, as well as on the place of residence. This aspect is to be discussed according to the fiscality of each country/city, but, still, it is an issue of generating, attracting, and preserving city resources. City brand, like any other brand, "is co-created" by those with an interest in the place's well-being (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015, p. 101). The residents are the most interested in the city's general well-being, as it is the place where they work and live. Our research addresses the residents of a capital city without a brand strategy, just to highlight how they relate to the city as a place of work in a particular context. The research may seem to be restrictive as context (work from home, pandemic, lockdown), but, in fact, it is about a unique and unifying snapshot of the residents and city relationship, that may be beneficially put into value in the city branding.

Work from home: conceptual delimitations

A permanence in our evolution, work from home has recently raised the interest both as the conceptual delimitations as well as regulations and procedures. We have always worked from home. Only the industrialization created the premises us to work in larger spaces, dully equipped, for which the houses were not large enough, the isolated or in small groups workers and employees would not have had the necessary facilities to best carried out their tasks. But, with emerging new technologies people have broken away from their fixed workplaces inside the factories or offices buildings and moved to more cozy, permissive, familiar places – at home. At least some of the jobs enabled it. So, we have returned to work from home in a very modern and technologized way.

There are a lot of terms, concepts, and theories about working outside the office, as we prefer to generally name it, until identifying, if possible, a general definition for it, at least in terms of pandemics. Let us disclosure the new conditionalities of the work outside the office premises. Our first step should address the variety of conceptualization of work outside the office.

In extensive research, Allen, Golden & Shockey (2015) summarized and further conceptualized telecommuting, as a comprehensive term for work carried out of office, in different other venues. Telecommuting is a concept coined in 1973 by an engineer who intended to move work to workers, instead of workers to the work, intending to improve vehicle traffic and reduce energy consumption (Avery & Zabel, 2001) cited in (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015, p. 41). It seems it was beneficial since, by 1997, ten thousand employees in public institutions were working from home or other similar

venues (Avery & Zabel, 2001). Besides these benefits on the external environment of the work and workers, this new method was beneficial to the families with both working spouses, helping them to manage better the housework and family responsibilities (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015, p. 41). Telecommuting was favorably influenced by the increasing capabilities of home computing (the 1980s), laptops, and cell phones (1990s), when sizes and prices were more and more affordable and the technical conditions were much spread (Kiza, 2013) cited in (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015, p. 41). As time passed, new aspects regarding telecommuting have appeared, like the proportion and relation of work in the office and work out the office, schedule, procedure, relating the work from home with the organization itself and its partners and associates, etc. Telecommuting has become subject to interpretations from the point of view of many disciplines, of various research methods and instruments. The "disjoined literature" addresses telecommuting from multiple points of view: transportation, information systems, management, communication, psychology, real estate, operations (p. 42). But, irrespective of the perspective, telecommuting is about the use of technology to perform the work and to ensure the contact between the organization and its employees or the contact between the employees and other entities.

In defining telecommuting, the support of "computer-based technology" (Golden , 2006) or "the systems that enable employees to perform regular" their duties (Pearce, 2009) is unanimously considered as one of *sine qua non* condition, whereas the work is performed partially or totally out of the office. Going deeper with their literature research, there are a series of other features for telecommuting. For instance, the duration of telecommuting work – hours per day, days per week or almost full-time – or the formal relation between the telecommuter and the organization: full-time/part-time contract, home-based business, free-lancer, outsourced independent contractor, etc., or the location of primary work done outside the office – home, locations outside the city but near a residence, call centers, sales locations, hotels, airports (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015, p. 44). Telecommuting refers to the work carried out of the office, either the employee's home or other premises (library, coffee shops, hotels, etc.), using the new technologies to perform the tasks and to keep in touch with co-workers, associates, managers, business partners, etc. (Savic, 2020).

The telecommuter is "part of the organization, not an independent contractor"; working isolated from colleagues, an employee focuses better on the work and avoid additional overtime hours, the "out of office" may be entirely at home or home and, partially, elsewhere (p. 44). Lister and Harnish (2011) found out in their research that professional, scientific, and management-related sectors and industries of information, finance, and insurance and services dominated the telecommuting field. In this way, its theory and practice have been enriched with new terms, such as telework, remote work, distributed work, virtual work, flexible work, flexplace, and distance work (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015, p. 42). In distributed work, "the employees work over geographical boundaries and to some extend work with computer-mediated communication in order to achieve a common goal" (Bosch-Sijtsema & Sivunen, 2013). Flexible work arrangements represent "alternative work options that allow work to be accomplished outside of the traditional temporal and/or spatial boundaries of a standard workday" (Stockley & Allen, 2007). This term refers to "the range of

employment practices both in terms of time (hours worked) and place (where the work is done) (Witaker Institute, 2021).

U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2013) considers that remote work allows "the employees to reside and work at a location beyond the local commuting area of the organization`s worksite; generally, it includes full-time telework and may result in a change in duty location to the alternative worksite". In this case, "the employee lives outside the vicinity of the organization", implying "changes in management and engagement of the workforce" (Savic, 2020). In some cases, the remote work is suitable for freelancers and independent contractors (Savic, 2020). Virtual work represents "spatially or geographically dispersed work arrangements that are generally characterized by a relatively short life span, technology-enhanced communications and a dearth of face-to-face interaction" (Tworoger, Ruppel, Gong, & Pohlman, 2013).

Telework has its part of multiple points of view definitions. Morganson et al. (2010) define telework as "work from the home or a satellite office, or when the work is carried out primarily in the field and when work is networked in such a way that employees regularly work in a combination of home, work and field contexts". Konradt et al. (2000), Garrett, Danzinger (2007) and Fonner, Roloff (2010) introduced in the definition "the aid of information and telecommunication services", "technology-mediated communication and sophisticated information-processing capabilities" and the support of "technological connections". Having in view these two dimensions – the work is performed out of the office and the support of technology – there is a very sensitive, almost invisible delimitation between telework and telecommuting. The differentiation between the concepts may have more geographic-based motivation – telework in Europe and telecommuting in the United States – then of essence (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015, p. 43). The Romanian legislation defines the telework as "the work by which the employee, on a regular and voluntary basis, fulfills his duties specific to the position, occupation or trade he/she holds, in a place other than the premises organized by the employer, at least one day a month, using information and communication technology" (Monitorul Oficial, 2018).

Some researchers accept the synonymy between these terms: work from home, remote work, or telecommuting (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis , 2020). Witaker Institute (2021) considers that telework and e-work are historical ones, more commonly used in the past, but generally refer to remote working – the practice of using technology (telework) and electronic methods (e-Work) to work at a location separate to or remote from the office. Other researchers consider that since the onset of COVID-19, the work from home is the generic term (Savic, 2020), with the following features: a person who is an employee of a company or a staff member of an organization; actual work engagement with a company or an organization on specific tasks; work being performed outside the company`s physical premises; telecommunication with the employer.

We adhere to the synonymity and use the term work from home. But, related to our research, one mention must be noted: the social and professional isolation, considered as "a key challenge faced by the teleworkers" (Feldman & Gainey, 1997), a challenge

that survived even in the internet era, generating, in certain conditions of "physical absence from work and subsequent reduced social participation with co-workers", even "social stigmatization" (Reaney, 2012).

The issues and discussion about working outside the office are still at the beginning. As a result of this parcourse through the conceptualization of the work outside the office, we have a few comments. Firstly, Allen et al.'s (2015) research provides us with extensive knowledge of the conceptualization of work outside the office. Still, it does not provide a unique and unanimously accepted definition of what we generally named here working outside the office. For the purpose of our research, we refer to the "work from home" term, respectively the work carried out in another premises, but the office, equipped with the necessary new (and emerging) technology, enabling the workers to optimal fulfill their tasks. Secondly, besides the employees of the companies, the above-mentioned research referred, we add to the pallet of persons working from home the freelancers, self-employed persons, liberal-professions, school and high-school teachers, higher education professors and associates, etc. Thirdly, additionally to their research, we would emphasize the fact that in the pandemic context, the work out of the office was a sudden decision, based on the logic of personal and public health. In some cases, it was a voluntary decision of the organization. In other cases, companies just observed the low and the national and local lockdown regulations. In most of the cases, the internal procedure, protocols, tasks, and duties were elaborated after the working from home decision had been taken. It was more an adaptation of the process.

Research methodology and results

Methodology

The objective of the paper is to identify the city inhabitants' attitude, opinion, and way of acting when their working conditions suddenly changed under the pressure of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, relating it to the city and city branding. The main research question is "How do the residents perceive the city in this new perspective?" detailed in three additional questions: 1. How do the respondents define, characterize and react to the work from home?; 2) How do the respondents relate themselves to the city during the work from home in pandemic time? 3) How do city brands meet their expectations?

We conducted qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews, in April – May 2021, virtually face-to-face, on Zoom and Webex platforms. After processing 15 interviews no new relevant information was revealed. The first respondents' persons were selected from the social proximity of the researchers, and their number increased on the snow-ball method. All the interviewed persons, but one, are university graduates. The other one is gymnasium school graduates. Except for the school girls, they have social science, technical, economical, and medical backgrounds. A formal position related to the organizations, the freelancers / self-employed, employees, SME entrepreneurs, upper management staff. Four of them decided to relocate to other cities, three in a small town 100 km from Bucharest, the other one in the second city of Romania, in a prolonged red zone of COVID-19.

Findings

Work from home is a unanimously known practice. All the responds are familiar with the practice of working from home, irrespective it is about their work, or a member of the family, acquittance, etc. More or less, "part of my work has been carried at home, anyhow" (R1, R3, R5, R9, R10, R12). When defining the term, the very first answered as a quick reaction is "not in the office" (R2, R3), followed by "at home" (R10, R13, R14). The lawyers (R1, R9) replied with a rhetorical tone: at the library, client premises, coffee shop.

The freelancers (R1, R9), SME entrepreneurs (R10, 14) had already had their "specially designed home office" in a dedicated room of the house/apartment and their daily routine had been for years adapted to this work. Only for the medical supplier (R13) "It was a little bit difficult to work from home, since I run a small wholesales business: my presence there was required almost 24/7, but, still, I managed, since summer, to work hybrid". Adapting to work from home was not a problem for anyone. Just "the crowded house and the time-sharing the resource (laptop) with other members of the family" could have been a little annoying at the beginning, but working by schedule, we have successfully gone through it" (R5, R15).

None of them was able to offer proper definition, but the layers referred to "telework". All the interviewed persons agreed on the necessity of new technology in working from home, naming: laptop, mobile phone, printer/scanner, excellent internet connection. All of them had already had the necessary equipment at home, at least "a very old laptop, but easily upgraded by e-commerce" (R12). The IT specialists went more into very technical details, according to the specific of their activity. All the others mentioned as "newly acknowledged" (R5, R6) the video conference platforms Webex and Zoom, Microsoft Teams (R15). Whatsapp has upgraded its relevance to the work, (R8, R11), "becoming more than a way to chat with friends, send selfies and other useless imagine with food, flowers, shoes and pets" (R7). Other applications used this period were: SalesForce, Box, Okta, Power Bi, Service Now, Office 365 (R2), Adobe Photoshop / Illustrator, WordPress (R3), VPN connection, Ondrive, and Teams (R7). One answer referred to the fact that "all this work from home need solid knowledge of IT or, at least, to be computer literate" (R10), Microsoft Teams, and Skype (R5, R12). The respondent emphasized that "this knowledge or literacy is stolen from family members, colleagues, business associates or found out by chance or by mistake" (R10). None of the interviewed persons felt safe in Bucharest. All of them, more or less formal within the interview frame criticized the authorities of pandemic management, communication, lockdown. There was a very sensitive line between the competencies of the authorities: medical, emergency and sanitary, law enforcement, administration. The level of authorities – national/local - was diluted. From this point of view, "Authorities, I mean here local authorities – City Council, Police – as well as the Army – should have been more severe, more strict, more authoritarian!" (R6). More of the interviewed persons blamed "their discreet presence, not to panic the population" (R8, R11), in a period "when we exactly needed to trust the state, they [authorities] were preoccupied <to look good in the picture>" (R8). R4, R11, R13 admitted that "even the population was to be blamed for the behavior"; for "not respected the rules,

regulations, and lockdown". These persons have unanimously appreciated "a population with a very low level of education and understanding of the civic duties in such a period". All the respondents agreed on the weaknesses of the local or central authorities putting the population in a vulnerable situation.

Regarding the other aspects of the inhabitant – city relation, for all of them, the city or the town was just the supplier for products (R4, R5, R7). "It lost its charm: no concerts, no theatre, no museums, no friends, no…" (R11). The social life was reduced to almost zero, except for the telephone and WhatsApp chatting with friends from time to time, on a more regular basis (R1, R4, R9, R15). This has led to a new assessment of friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and a more meticulous selection of them (R5, R11). The cultural life is what all the respondents missed during this period. But this was substituted by the numerous online movies, museums presentations, city tours around the world, theatre, etc.

Lasting more than a year, some of the interviewed persons have had to manage a few situations with the local authorities, mainly fiscal and city hall institutions. It was a sudden (R11) and forced digitalization (R5) that "put the state clerks at work" (R5) and they improved very much the citizen–city dialogue. From this point of view, forced digitalization is a huge step forward for the city.

During the lockdown, the city was appreciated for the fresh air, clean streets, light traffic (R8, R9). Of course, after relaxation, the city came back to the same polluted, uncivilized, crowded place "to survive" (R13) and work (R1, R6).

The respondents did not feel safe in Bucharest and, who afforded it, relocated either to a small town (R5, R8, R15) where they have the "cottage" or in the second great city of Romania but, at "the parents home, isolated, with large garden for leisure time, fresh air, doing something when you have nothing to do" (R3). The persons relocated to the little town did not sense any differences between Bucharest and their new residence. All that they need (FMC, home appliances, IT, and day-to-day consumables) was just at a click distance (R5, R8). Even the cultural life was fulfilled with the numerous online and virtual shows, museums tours, city tours, etc. "The meaning of the great city, with multiple opportunities, with large professional career perspectives has melted like this (she is snapping her fingers). Even more, I was able to reconfigure my specialization only on online training. I followed courses, web-binars, video-conferences, exams and evaluations, everything I needed only from my comfortable chair, at my home desk, laptop, printer/scanner." (R5) "During this lockdown and due to the work from home period I have fully understood the meaning, benefits, and social utility of telemedicine. Until this work from home by law, I have not paid attention at all to telemedicine. For me, it was unimaginable medicine. Now, I have realized I am useful even in this way." (R5).

For all the interviewed persons, there is a great, "dramatic" (R1) discrepancy between the personal life before and during this period. From time to time, the isolation felt like an unjust punishment (R2, R11). They "wisely accepted" (R2) the social restrictions both for the personal as well as the general well-being (R9). But "the work completely took over his personal life, as much as this personal life was" (R1), the management,

the business partners, co-workers considering the others available to meet their needs 24/7 (R2, R3, R11). The web designer admitted that during the pandemic his workload increased very much, many companies needed this kind of service when transferring online (R3).

The interviewed persons emphasized very much the limitations of the great city: traffic, uneducated population, low respect of the law, the absence of a leader to cheer them up, to encourage, to inspire. "The concern for the environment is almost zero." (R1) Too much pollution, a lot of dirt on the streets (R10, R14). Despite"all these vulnerabilities characteristic to a great cosmopolite metropole of the XXI century" (R11), they are unanimous in highly appreciated the city for the cultural life. It seems that "Bucharest is comparable under this cultural opportunity to the largest cities of Europe and not only" (R7). Still, even this weak point has been creatively overcome due to the many and various online museums and city tours, opera shows, concerts, theatre plays.

The pandemic, the lockdown has proven and has taught us the benign way of working from home. Very much blamed under the aspect of isolating from co-workers, friends, the work from home has its undeniable advantages: better time management, less waste time on traffic, better supervision of family (kids, especially), increasing IT skills. Many of the interviewed have already returned to the work in the office, but they have adapted and adopted the hybrid way. Except for one of them – the medical supplier SME entrepreneur – "which physical presence in the managerial office is needed 48 hours a day and 14 days a week" (R13).

Conclusions

The interviewed persons provided the researchers with detailed information about the work from home way of life. Regarding the first research question, we retain for our purpose that there is no formal definition of the work from home. Just the informal one: "work outside the office carried out with the necessary IT equipment and new technologies". Besides, of course, the definition stipulated in Law 81/2018 is known only by legal professionals. All of them were already computer literate and able to rapidly adapt to the new video conferences platforms and applications. The work from home allowed even an upgrade of the professional career. Work from home or hybrid may become a general trend. It may become an alternative to the work in the office and the related crowded traffic to times a day, at least.

Regarding the way interviewed persons related to the city during the work from home, the respondents firstly mention the lack of cultural life. The social life – friends, family – was substituted to a certain degree with the telephone calls, WhatsApp, video conferences, etc. All the functions of a city, all its attributes have been completed by the online and virtual applications.

Regarding the differences between work from home and work from the office, there were no differences in the quality of work. May in the quantity, because there was a general perception of 24/7 availability of employees and business associates to reply

the mail, telephone calls. Working from home was a good opportunity to upgrade the professional career and to increase the business.

In spite of the common sense isolation, the interviewed persons succeeded to have a full family life. They fully tested and tasted the online cultural life. It seems that a good internet connection, a laptop, and a smart TV are enough for a comfortable indoor life.

Unfortunately, the aspects strictly regarding the city – safety, order, law – were much under the expectations. They expected a more clear vision, a more firm action from the authorities. They underlined the fact that the weaknesses of the city are the result of the under-educated population. The interviewed persons highly appreciated the city and the town as internet providers and goods delivery, downgrading how the city was supposed to be perceived in the theory and practice of place branding. These favorable aspects denote the solidity of the business environment and its adaptability to the crisis, at least in terms of home deliveries.

One more issue should be discussed here: the glow of city branding. We have mentioned the role and benefits of place branding. And we continue to appreciate and trust their benefits. It seems that it is time for a shift in the perspective of city branding. Up to now, it has been oriented to the exterior, in attracting external resources – as tourists. What about the residents – internal stakeholders, creators and generators of city income, city values? The city brand was focused on business facilities, emerging technology availability. It seems all these have been so much improved, digitalized, minimized, and become very affordable that enable us to move wherever we want to be as performant as in the city or even more performant.

Maybe the city is disappointed, but, we shall not forget that we are talking here about a city without a brand strategy, just reputation, image, authenticity, and other attributes not yet gathered in a vision. Secondly, even when there is a city branding, as the literature preview revealed, it is oriented more to the external stakeholders – tourists – than to the internal ones, as residents are. Thirdly, all the cities, irrespective of dimension, have been seriously affected by the pandemic.

One of the limitations of the research is the relative proximity of the respondents. Another limitation is that our research refers just to one very large city of Romania – Bucharest. Still, in a certain way of interpreting the data, the single model offered by Bucharest may be extensively exploited, as Bucharest does not have a proper brand strategy. What we generously name brand strategy is just an empirical city behavior as having a brand strategy, based more on reputation, image, authenticity, and other elements that may consist one day in a valuable city brand strategy.

We recommend the research be extended to other cities and to include other socio-professional categories of respondents. Also, we expect, recommend, and suggest that the experience of Bucharest during the pandemic, even only from the work from home perspective, to be added to the city reputation, image, authenticity, and other elements and put into value in the city brand strategy.

We conclude that, indeed, what Wirth mentioned, the urban or large city way of life is not confined only to the great city, but also, to the smaller ones. This is due to the continuously decreasing dependence of the city, citizens, and stakeholders on the natural resources and man-made comfort facilities of the day to day life. This is what we refer to as "infrastructure". So, work from home is possible both in small or great cities. This means that what had been a strong point for a long time in setting up a strategy – work conditions, infrastructure, and cultural life – seems to have lost the power. These are not so prominent and relevant elements for city branding. The reverse of the coin is that this category of stakeholders may be residents everywhere, contributing if not with the real, material results of the work, but, at least, with their contribution in the consumption and fiscality. All of them are taxpayers and all of them consume partly from the city's small business environment. The respondents working from home during the pandemic strengthened this conclusion: due to the internet, mobile phone, video platform, etc., the great city ceased to be so great. They were affected only by the restrictions of their social and cultural life. Even these, to a certain degree, because also due to the virtual theatre, museums, concerts, etc. even these could be a substitute. As much as the sanitary protection is concerned, all the respondents agree on the fact the government, state authorities and institutions, local government, city mayor himself, and other representatives of the authorities should have managed better this crisis. Of course, this is the general picture: global pandemic, global crisis, global helplessness.

The city, as we know it, has ceased to be indispensable. The possibility of working from home has diminished the importance of the metropolis, diminishing the historical differences of the center-periphery type and the otherness complexes. This is a challenge for the future of city branding.

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Annex

Codification of the interviewed persons

Code	Age	Occupation	Field of activity	Localization
R1	31-40	lawyer	Legal, free lancer	Bucharest
R2	31-40	finance	Economic	Bucharest
R3	21-30	WEB designer	IT, free lancer	Relocated, city
R4	31-40	marketing	economic, management	Bucharest
R5	41-50	medicine	medicine, associate professor	Relocating, small town
R6	21-30	marketing	employee, corporate	Bucharest
R7	41-50	sociology	CEO, corporate	Bucharest
R8	51-60	engineer	country manager, corporate	Relocated
R9	41-50	lawyer	legal, free lancer	Bucharest
R10	61+	engineer	SME entrepreneur	Bucharest
R11	51-60	marketing	employee	Bucharest
R12	51-60	teacher	education	Bucharest
R13	51-60	medicine	SME entrepreneur	Bucharest
R14	51-60	IT	SME entrepreneur	Bucharest
R15	15-20	school	education	Relocating