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## Institutional visibility - criterion of the effectiveness of educational marketing actions. Case study

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### Abstract

The specifics of contemporary society involve, at the level of educational sciences, both epistemological adjustments as well as adjustments in the relations of the school as an institution with the governing authority. Reduction of the state's involvement in the organization and operation of the school implies, alongside decentralization and the reduction of allocated budgetary resources, both the assumption of the principle of self-financing by the various educational institutions and the concern for competitiveness as a prerequisite for survival in the conditions of a competitive type of educational reality. Schools thus become competitors in the field of educational offers, beneficiaries of the education system become consumers in the educational market and the orientation of the marketing activity towards increasing institutional visibility constitutes one of the basic conditions for success.

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### 1. Problem statement

Contemporary society is not only a society of knowledge but also a competitive society. Educational institutions, in their capacity as providers of educational services to the whole society, are responsible for specific marketing actions to popularize their educational offer in response to the needs of society, in accordance with the resources and

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culture of the respective organization. In other words, the main task of educational marketing is to identify and understand both trends in the field as well as educational and training needs of the consumers of the educational market (Lepkova, 2009). Through the use of adequate strategies, methods and tools for the investigation of existing requirements at the level of the educational market, the marketing activity must ultimately be seen as a human activity aimed at satisfying needs and wishes through exchange processes (Kotler, 1998).

Regardless of how we define educational marketing, it becomes very clear that the school institutions, like populations and organizations, occupy physical, temporal, symbolic, and social space. It is reasonable, then, to assume that these institutions are characterized by ecological dynamics (Abrutyn, 2012). The success of actions taken towards increasing the institutional visibility of the school will ultimately depend on the degree of satisfaction of the following three indicators: Quality of the educational process, quality of administrative and secretarial services, and the quality of additional services (accommodation, meals, entertainment). The institutional development is thus dependent on the success of institutional management activities and implicitly on the educational marketing as a specific function of management. The marketing tools and activities help these entities to improve the educational programs and adapt them to the individual needs of the clients, to keep the production costs under control, which are limited by the small public budget, and to perform and promote these services efficiently, leading to an increased organizational performance (Barbu, 2012). Although the principles and action directions of the educational marketing are universal, it should not be forgotten that different educational markets have different educational needs and even if the concepts of educational marketing are applicable in all these markets, there is still a need for local analysis and local adjustments (Enache, 2012). In the particular case of educational institutions in Romania, educational marketing must take into account certain peculiarities among which the decrease in school population, the promotion of education funding per capita and the reduction of confidence in the existence of a correlation between success in school and success in life. This reality makes it necessary to elaborate case studies based on which educational marketing strategies with a high degree of coherence can be developed and implemented, efficient in short and medium term (Manea, 2013).

## **2. Purpose of study**

In developing and promoting the image of the inclusive school for a positive perception in the community, educational marketing strategies represent a factor of great and real importance (Booth & Ainscow, 2007). Given this starting point, the main aim of our study was to design and implement a set of educational marketing policies and actions at the School Center for Inclusive Education from Beclean, Bistrita county, Romania, that are likely to lead to increased institutional visibility of this school. The reason why the chosen school was a school for persons manifesting special educational requirements is that this type of educational institutions, because of their specificity, are less brought to public attention, and receive little attention from the community.

## **3. Hypothesis and major coordinates of the research**

The hypothesis that was the basis of our research was that the practice of client-centered educational marketing, including systematic promotion of the educational offer, popularization of educational activities of good practices and mediatization of school performance and extra-curricular activities of students (shows, competitions) will result in increased institutional visibility of the School Center for Inclusive Education. Our investigative approach was based on qualitative research. The main reason for this choice was that qualitative research involves obtaining responses from a small number of respondents and the results are of a qualitative style: ideas, perceptions, feelings, associated values, reasons, preferences, suggestions (Brătucu, 2012). The case study was doubled by a questionnaire based survey method. The questionnaire, including nine items designed in the form of closed questions, was applied to 32 persons among local authorities (mayor, city councilors, directors of schools in the city, police representatives, etc.), to members of county authorities (management of the County Council and the County School Inspectorate, etc.) and personalities considered to be representative for the economic and cultural life of the locality. As for the items, they mainly focused on identifying the extent to which these persons appreciate and know the importance of inclusive education and value the school activities. These people were chosen taking into account both their influence in the community and their standing as opinion leaders and the fact that most of them have the power to

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