

Chapter 4

A Theoretical Approach for Sustainable Communication in City Branding: Multilateral Symmetrical Communication Model

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ABSTRACT

The key to success of cities having high brand-value and awareness is the configuration of successful brand structures for the participation of stakeholders into the process. Starting from this point, symmetric and sustainable communication among stakeholders is assumed to play an essential role as a prerequisite for achieving success. The key to ensuring sustainable practice of any discipline is the communication. In this regard, in infrastructure, renovation, finance, tourism, sociology and cultural studies, the symmetry and participation of all of the parties are also considered to be important in terms of communication. Alongside the theoretical framework of city branding, this chapter seeks to contribute to the literature with “Multilateral Symmetrical Communication Model,” which has been created to meet the requirements for city brands. The impact of stakeholders’ interaction on the brand image, the impact of ensuring multilateral communication between both parts, and demonstrating applicability of these are the main focuses of this chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

The cities have been influencing the national and regional development for centuries. They have been attractive residential areas providing many opportunities in domains such as information, transportation and business interactions. According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs report (2014), the urban population of the world has grown rapidly since 1950, from 746 million to 3.9 billion in 2014 (p.1). Especially skilled employees prefer to live in towns, and this preference plays significant role in national economic growth (Florida, 2011). Besides increasing population of cities, qualifications of residents make impact on city images on the markets such as tourism, film production or congress. The studies show that destinations with a good image have much pie on the business markets (Anholt, 2010). Residents as a part of city life and culture are the key important element of city's monitored image (Kavaratzis, 2008). Establishing good relationship with city's residents helps creating a powerful city brand image (Palmer, 2010). Hence, strategic communication management gains more and more importance in all areas related to the city.

The term "communication" is widely considered on a preferential basis for all types of branding efforts in the marketing literature. Some of the successful cities are already aware of the significant role of communications in terms of marketing, since early 20th century (Euro Cities, 2010). Today, masses share their experiences and thoughts via the Internet, and those impressions shape the images of city brands (Kamlami, 2011). In this information era, strategic communication increases its role and importance as a dominant weapon in competition, for both city brands and product brands.

From the aspect of integrated marketing communications, the term 'branding' is one of the main problems of communication discipline. The term expresses a continuous communication and perception process and it's a result of controlled and uncontrolled communications actions (Finne & Grönross, 2009). Other areas such as tourism, architecture and public administration also need professional communication touch in order to become popular and significant in city branding (Kalandides, 2012).

Unlike corporate brands, city brands have multi-layered and complex communication environments that include many different types of groups or individuals who live, work or visit the city (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2010). These groups compose the stakeholders of a city. Behaviours of the residents, impressions of visitors, and actions of private sector members shape city images in today's global world (Gilmore, 2010). Because of its multi-dimensional structure and multiple stakeholders as a brand, city marketers need to build strong networks with all publics that are effective on the city image (Palmer, 2010).

The increasing importance of communication triggered the discussion of the way that builds long term and healthy relations with the stakeholders. According to Fleming (2012) it requires "formalized sustainable relationships between stakeholders and a common understanding of the meaning, expectations, outcomes, associated responsibilities and level of commitment required by all involved" (p.1). Concerning a city brand, holding a wide perspective for communication environment is a necessity to understand different stakeholder groups (Dinnie & Fola, 2009). Since city brands are built upon city images, some of these stakeholders are the first-degree image carriers of a city brand, as well. Therefore, sustainability of relations depending on sustainable communication is gaining significance in both practice and academic aspects in terms of city branding (Eccles, Ioannau & Serafeim, 2011). The key success of the world cities, whose brand awareness is high, is the configuration of successful brand structures for the involvement of the stakeholders in the period (Grosveld, 2002).

With this study, the authors aim to contribute the literature by conceptualizing the term "sustainable communication" as a prerequisite to achieve strong city brands. The communication among the stake-

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