Chapter 60
A Brief History of City Branding in Istanbul

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes city branding efforts in Istanbul in the context of urban tourism. The chapter focuses on the evolution of promotional practices from disorderly and inconsistent marketing strategies to a coherent city brand. This relatively brief but complex history of city branding in Istanbul is divided into three analytical and interrelated phases: Self-Orientalism, the City of Religions and the Multi-Faceted City. In analyzing this process, the main representations, themes, slogans and other methods of city branding are discussed. In doing so, this study attempts to introduce a historical/chronological approach to the city branding literature in the case of Istanbul. Next, in the light of this approach and the case study, the study aims to discuss general implications and reasons about changes of city brands over time.

INTRODUCTION

Tourists flock to certain cities with particularly distinctive images and amenities. This has led to a worldwide adaptation of practices of city branding, which has emerged as a distinct and sophisticated field within urban studies. City branding has recently become associated with urban policy-making aimed at attracting investment and tourists. In order to gain a competitive advantage over others, cities have begun to build distinctive brands. Drawing from their local characteristics, these brands generally emphasize 'unique' 'attractive' and 'interesting' features of cities (Grodach, 2009; Hospers, 2009; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; 2007; Ooi, 2011). It is expected that when these characteristics are represented in a coherent city branding policy, the external image of a city is consolidated and therefore its competitiveness is increased. Coherent city brands are usually accompanied by specially designed logos and catchy or captivating slogans. These features often reflect the city's history, socio-cultural features, architecture and geographical location in order to influence people's perceptions of the city (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; 2007; Smidt-Jensen, 2006; Zhang &Zhao, 2009). Another branding strategy is to organize events. It is widely acknowledged that out-of-the-ordinary activities (e.g. royal weddings, papal coronations and

the inauguration of a world leader) also enhance the competitiveness of the host city (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Particularly mega-events such as the Olympic Games, World Trade Fairs, festivals and cultural titles like European Capital of Culture are considered as a key to global recognition and consequently tourist attraction (Burton, 2003). These events may act as a catalyst to initiate branding efforts (Nobili, 2005) or even constitute the branding strategy (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Furthermore, it seems branding through architecture has worked out well for some cities. For example, several cities in Europe such as Barcelona, Glasgow and Bilbao have become models showing how a city can turn to a tourist magnet by following urban regeneration strategies and creating new landmarks or iconic structures. Furthermore, the built environment (e.g. landmarks, particular districts, iconic buildings and symbolic structures) and famous personalities (e.g. Gaudi and Barcelona, Kafka and Prague) can make cities identifiable and result in global awareness (Anholt, 2006; Ashworth, 2009; Hospers 2011).

One aspect of city brands must be emphasized: cities do not have equal resources and capacities for branding themselves. Firstly, some cities have easily identifiable images that stick better in people's memory. For example, Paris and Venice are known for romance, New York and Berlin for diversity, Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro for entertainment, Singapore and Tokyo for modernity, Washington and Moscow for politics and Stockholm for science (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). If a city lacks such a reputation and/or above-mentioned features, it is generally challenging to brand it (Hospers 2011). In such cases city branding is like gambling; there is no guarantee that a city branding strategy will work. According to Anholt (2006; 2007), advertising and marketing strategies can end up being a waste of time and money; it is hard to make an unattractive destination look appealing. Anholt (2008, p. 11) also underlines that *there is a big difference between observing that places have brand images and claiming that places can be branded, which is an excessively ambitious, entirely unproven and ultimately irresponsible claim.* Thus, the advantage lies among cities with existing reputations that can be transformed into brands rather than places that must invent them.

Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, financial and cultural center and one of the most visited destinations in the world, is no exception. Despite its considerable population and rapid development, its significance in international and regional trade and perhaps more importantly its strong position in the international tourism market, Istanbul is a latecomer to the global competition of branding. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of tourists in Istanbul have called for new tourism promotion strategies. The case of Istanbul represents the first time in Turkey that a city has developed its own specifically *urban* tourism strategies.

As city branding is relatively a new concept and it has a brief history, understandably the academic research on Istanbul's branding efforts is yet limited in scope. One common feature of these few studies is that they all consider the European Capital of Culture event (2010) as the catalyst for city branding in Istanbul (Doğan 2011; Doğan & Sirkeci, 2013, Bıçakçı, 2012; Uysal, 2013). Although Istanbul's official city brand is less than a decade old, its evolution from disorderly and inconsistent marketing strategies to a coherent city brand reveals a complex process. This paper investigates this relatively brief but complicated history of city branding in Istanbul in the context of urban tourism. This paper analyses Istanbul's branding process by dividing it into three interrelated phases: 'Self-Orientalism', 'the City of Religions' and 'the Multi-Faceted City'. In doing so, the aim of this study is two-fold. First, it attempts to introduce a historical/chronological approach to city branding in the case of Istanbul. Secondly, through this approach, the study aims to draw general implications about changes and modifications of city brands over time. Given the complexity of the branding literature, the above-mentioned branding processes are only analyzed in the context of urban tourism. Therefore, the data for this study consists of several tourism materials such as tourist guides, booklets, brochures, maps, advertisements, campaign

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