

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING LOCAL-CULTUREL SYMBOLS IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING DESTINATION BRAND: EXAMPLE OF ESKİŞEHİR CITY

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INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF BRAND

The concept brand that we can claim to have emerged by the stamping of the animals by the villagers in past years in order to distinguish them from the animals of the other villagers and to prevent crises that may arise this way is built on the phenomenon differentiation that can also be understood from this simple example. While the word brand is defined as “**A special name or sign that is used in order to introduce a commercial good, any object and distinguish them from similar ones**” (<http://bit.ly/1vB8cWB>, 16.4.2014), it is defined as “**Any kind of sign including the names of people, which can be published and reproduced through publication and viewed in drawing such as and especially words, shapes, letters, numbers, the shape or packaging of the goods, on condition that they ensure that the goods and services of an enterprise are distinguished from the goods or services of another enterprise**” in the decree law on the protection of the brands (<http://bit.ly/1vyaepn>, 14.4.2014).

And according to the definition of American Marketing Association, brand is “**a name, term, sign, symbol, design or their combination, which is used in the determination of the goods and services of an enterprise or a group of enterprises and differentiation from the goods and services of the rivals**” (<http://bit.ly/1mxyeol>, 10.02.2014). In summary, brand is a generic name that is generally used for all the words, numbers, sounds, letters, shapes, colours, packaging and signs that distinguish a product or a service from its competitors.

The present situation is so clear that it is difficult for us to explain the content of the concept brand by only consumption products in our day. For a politician, a sports club or a sports person, a country, or a city of that country can be defined as a brand in our day and they can find a place in the integrated marketing process.

DESTINATION BRAND

The purpose of creating a brand and managing it affectively constitute the basis of the concept destination branding, just as in other marketing products. The phenomenon tourism has taken out of being stuck between the concepts “sea”, “beach”, “seaside” and “hotel”, especially in recent years, and it varied a lot as the regions that lack these qualities brought especially their local-cultural properties into the forefront. In this process, regions or certain destinations felt the obligation of repositioning themselves and started to make attempts to become a destination brand in order to increase their levels of welfare and take a share from the market of tourism.

While the activities of creating a destination brand, i. e. the attempts of creating a brand especially in the area of tourism by means of bringing certain properties of particular regions into the forefront, are generally regarded in connection with the ministries of tourism of the countries, local governments, NGOs or private enterprises may also carry out activities in this

field. While the concept destination brand that we can basically define as **“the activities that aim to render the destination identity that is created in line with the properties of a place suitable for the target groups that are expected to prefer that destination”** (Yavuz, 2007:40) can be regarded as an activity with the sole purpose of attracting tourists, they are also a process of vital importance for different groups.

For the branding of a destination brings about the opportunity of income and employment for the locals living in the destination region as a result of the visits of the tourist who are willing to benefit from the products and services in the region, and it also ensures the development of the substructure and superstructure of the region.

In recent years, it is observed that big marketing moves are made in the basis of the countries and that countries increase their introduction activities with a destination brand study. In this process, countries try to present themselves to potential tourists that plan to visit their countries with the best slogan that summarizes their marketing targets after setting the best visual that define themselves as their logo. Thus, we can define the destination branding as identities that differentiate the destinations from one another. Pekyaman (2008:46) listed the benefits of destination branding for regions as follows:

- **In addition to differentiate the products and promising value, brands evoke the beliefs, arouse emotions and turn them into behaviours.**
- **A strong country brand attracts both tourists and investments to the country.**
- **A brand differentiates a product/destination in the competitive environment and renders it special.**
- **Destination brands reveal the bond between the destination image and the self images of the consumers or consumer needs and the symbolic value and functional attractiveness of the brand.**
- **It ensures the recognition of the touristic destination and differentiation from similar touristic destinations by the tourists.**
- **It reduces the risks brought about by the inability to try a product before trying as a property of tourism.**
- **The branding of a touristic destination facilitates the efforts of branding the products symbolising the destination.**
- **It leads to repeated visits to the destination; and it ensures this by creating an emotional bond between its customers.**
- **It ensures the recognition of the destination by creating a difference between the destinations.**
- **It ensures the trust of the tourists for the destination whereby facilitating the process of choosing the destination.**

Baker (2007:12) summarizes the benefits of destination branding for the region as follows:

“- It creates a mutual target regarding the image and attractiveness of the relevant destination that combines public institutions, private sector institutions, non-governmental organizations, in short, all of the segments of the society. It provides the destination prestige, awareness, faithfulness and popularity.

- **It helps correcting misconceptions.**
- **It increases the income, profit and tax income of the stakeholders.**
- **It helps increasing the attractiveness of local products.**

- It helps attracting skilful people to the business market and ensuring the permanence of these people.
- It ensures the increase in new business investments.
- It increases the sense of belonging of the locals and their pride of the place they live in.
- It ensures a quicker recovery in crisis situations such as major natural disasters or negative propagandas that may occur.
- It increases the share that the relevant destination takes from world resources.”



Figure 1: Slogans and logos determined by certain countries in the process of destination branding process.

Source: <http://bit.ly/RoCJHH>, 6.5.2014

In addition to this, the insufficiency of the single destination brand understanding of a country as a whole especially for countries with different identities and cultures ensured the gradual increase of the understanding of regional marketing. Another important factor of the objective regional branding can be said to be that countries increasingly started to use similar marketing visuals or slogans in the process of branding. Logo works in which certain visuals such as “sea”, “beach” and “tree” that target especially summer months moved away from motivating target groups and the differentiation of the regions in the countries from this usual structure has virtually become an obligation.



Figures 2: Examples of logo works that frequently resemble one another in destination branding studies as countries in recent years.

Source: <http://bit.ly/RoCJHH>, 6.5.2014

Starting from this fact, private or legal persons led by municipalities, non-governmental organizations or certain private enterprises started to make strategic plans for the branding of their region. Özdemir (2008:132) lists the principles of destination brand development as follows:

- **Being tourist-oriented:** Taking the wishes of the tourists directly as the basis in terms of brand creation rather than the issues that the destination has or thought to be asked for by the tourists
- **Focusing:** Developing offers that attracts a specific market by focusing on it.
- **Building loyalty:** Focusing on not only the rational but also emotional reactions of the tourists.

- **Taking as a basis: Supporting the main strategy of destination management organizations.**

Just as products that complete their branding process are distinguished in the market when compared to their competitors in our day and can create a consumer loyalty, destination brands that successfully entered the branding process and were able to maintain this process have also become quite strong brands in the area of tourism in our day. One of the most important issues in this process is that the destination that will be branded can promise the tourists things about there. For the tourists pay attention to the information, properties and values of a particular region during their visit to a destination other than their own country. Thus, the destination needs data that reflect its self values in the cultural-local symbols that it considers to feature both in their slogans and logos.



Figure 3: Some of the examples of destination branding process aimed at prominent cities of the world.

Source: <http://bit.ly/RoCJHH>, 6.5.2014

LOCAL-CULTURAL SYMBOLS REVEALED IN THE PROCESS OF DESTINATION BRANDING FOR ESKISEHIR PROVINCE:

GENEREL INFIRMATION ABOUT THE ESKISEHIR PROVINCE

Eskişehir is the centre of the province with the same name that maintained its existence under such civilizations as Phrygia, Byzantium and Anatolian Seljuks in Central Anatolia region of the Turkish Republic. According to the historical information in Wikipedia encyclopaedia;

“The Hittites established a big state based on Eskişehir in the 14th century BC. It is seen that Eskişehir was the principal city during the period of the Hittites as a result of its importance and place. The Phrygians that entered Anatolia in the 12th century BC spread in Anatolia and settled in the region under the name Dorylaion. The region was reigned by the Lydians and then Persians after Phrygians. Captured by the Macedonian king Alexander in the 4th century BC, Eskişehir remained under the Empire of Macedonian king Alexander up to 323 BC, when Alexander died. The region that moved under the control of the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC remained under the reign of the Byzantium after the Roman Empire got separated until Rome was divided into two. Dorylaion that came under the domination of the Byzantium once again was captured by the Seljuks in 1074. The city witnessed the wars that take place between the Seljuks and the Crusaders during the period of the Seljuks. During this period, the name of the city is called “Sultanönü”. In 1289, Anatolian Seljuks gave Eskişehir to Osman Gazi. Eskişehir, which was captured by the Karamanids during the period of Orhan Gazi, was once again incorporated into the Ottoman lands by Murad I. The city remained connected to Ankara Beylic up to the first years of Fatih. Changes occurred in the Administrative Organization of Anatolia

when Kütahya became the principal beylic after 1451; and Eskişehir, which was connected to Ankara was then connected to Kütahya Principal Beylik. The railway reached Eskişehir, which was a jurisdiction of Kütahya Sanjak of Hüdavendigâr (Bursa) Province, in 1890s. After the railway reached Eskişehir, the commerce in the city was enlivened. Immigrants from the Caucasus, Crimea, Romania and Bulgaria were settled in the region during the 19th century. The city started to develop after immigrants were settled after 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian war.” (<http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eski%C5%9Fehir>, 28.4.2014)

As can be understood from the short historical information, the city that remained in the middle of the important commercial routes of many empires was also an important transition point in the period of the Republic of Turkey. Sivrihisar, Mihalıççık and Seyitgazi in 1926 and Çifteler and Mahmudiye in 1954 were connected to Eskişehir, which became a province in 1925 after the proclamation of the republic, whereby becoming districts. Sarıcakaya was turned into a district with another law enacted in 1957, and the number of the districts increased to 6. Afterwards, Alpu, Beylikova and İnönü were turned into districts with the law no. 3392 in 1987 and Günyüzü, Han and Mihalgazi were turned into districts with the law no. 3544 of 9 May 1990; thus the number of the districts increased to 12. 2 more new districts were established with the name of Odunpazarı and Tepebaşı by annulling the Central district with the law no. 5747 published in the official gazette of 22 March 2008, and the total number of districts of the province increased to 14.

‘SWOT’ ANALYSIS OF ESKISEHIR PROVINCE

SWOT analysis is a process in which the English words “Strengths”, “Weaknesses”, “Opportunities” and “Threats” are analyzed. SWOT analysis is a strategical technique used in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of an institution, technique, process, situation or person in a project or commercial venture and to detect the opportunities and threats resulting from the internal and external environment. This technique requires to determine the targets of a project or commercial venture and define positive or negative internal and external factors for achieving the target. This method was developed by Learned, Christensen, Andrews and Guth, who were professors in Harvard University in the 1960s.

It was considered appropriate to make a SWOT analysis and determine the priorities accordingly in order to turn Eskişehir city into a destination brand, and it was analyzed using the strategic plan developed by Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality for the years 2010-2015 (http://www.eskisehir-bld.gov.tr/dosyalar/stratejik_plan/2015.pdf, 17.4.2014).

STRENGTHS:

Eskişehir developed rapidly especially during the mayoralty of Prof. Dr. Yılmaz Büyükerşen as of 1999. That the mayor is a science man, he has a broad vision and he is able to use different sources for the projects he wanted to realize are among the city’s strongest aspects. In addition, that the debt of the municipality, and hence the city, is very low constitutes an important opportunity for new investments and investors.

OPPORTUNITIES:

That the projects realized in the leadership of Prof. Dr. Yılmaz Büyükerşen again in the last 10 years earned much approval by Turkey increased the trust of the locals of the city in him and also attracted potential investors from outside the city. Eskişehir has a great potential of becoming the centre of the congress tourism as a result of two state universities it has and health tourism as a result of its hot water. Apart from these, the general situation of the city has quite a high potential in terms of general tourism and it is necessary to reveal certain local-cultural symbols in this sense.

The city also has a big potential for the TV series-cinema industry that is in demand in Turkey with its natural resources, historical spots and developing city structure. It also has a strong potential in terms of qualified human source that the city needs owing to the deep-rooted state universities in the city.

WEAKNESSES:

Mainly two issues come into prominence in the weaknesses of strategic planning of Eskişehir city; one of them is that the cooperation of the city, and hence the municipality, with the two universities in the city is quite low. Although Eskişehir is called the “student city” and quite a great number of students and their parents live in the city, and the Mayor Prof. Dr. Yılmaz Büyükerşen is the former rector of Anadolu University, the number of the works that are jointly carried out with the university in the strategic planning and development of the city is quite low. In addition, that the city has very low revenues in terms of the income which is the key point in the development of the city is another weakness.

THREATS:

Although Eskişehir may be among the most rapidly developing cities of Turkey in recent years, that different institutions in the city are in a big competition with one another and make limited number of cooperation for certain targets bring future projects to a halt. In addition, economical problems that are constantly at issue of the country in general are naturally reflected on the municipalities and this prevents the realization of new investments.

Furthermore, Eskişehir province is located in the seismic belt, although not in the first degree. The great Eskişehir earthquake that occurred on 20 February 1965 showed that earthquake is a significant and vital fact for Eskişehir province just like many other cities. This fact is an important threat against possible investments to be made both in social terms and commercial terms.

LOCAL-CULTUREL SYMBOLS REVEALED DURING THE DESTINATION BRAND WORKS OF ESKISEHIR PROVINCE

ODUNPAZARI HOUSES:

Odunpazarı is one of the central districts of Eskişehir province and the first settlement of Eskişehir. Odunpazarı was set up on the hills in the southern part of the city. According to a story, the first people who considered to settle in Eskişehir hang a sheep liver in Odunpazarı and the area where current Porsuk Stream lies, and they decided to choose the place in which

the liver lasts longer as their settlement area. As the liver hung in Odunpazarı lasted longer, the first settlement area was made there.



Figure 4: States of the houses in Odunpazarı district before the restoration works
Source: http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odunpazar%C4%B1_Evleri (16.4.2014)

Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality provided the city an important local-cultural value with the “Odunpazarı Houses” project it started in 2007 for Odunpazarı region that is quite old for both the people living there and the general look of the city, and even under the threat of collapse.

In Odunpazarı district where the biggest restoration work of Turkey was started, first 27 houses were reconstructed and famous guests were hosted in these beautiful historical houses, hence introducing, i. e. advertising the region. Some of the restored houses where interesting and historical events took place, the three-storey building overlooking Tiryaki Hasan Paşa Street was used as the headquarters and armoury of the Greek commander during Turkish War of Independence, and Arif Nihat Asya wrote the poem “Bayrak” in this house. According to another story, Evliya Çelebi was hosted in another house in the same street.

In addition to restoring and gaining the houses to the city as boutique hotels, the old bazaars in the region that sank into perishment were also regained to social life. Atlıhan Handcraft Bazaar, where meerschaum that is among the most important sources of income of the city is sold most frequently; “Modern glass art museum” that was opened in order to provide the opportunity to earn an income for the housewives and students and pursue a career; and Kurşunlu complex, where professionals of many different branches have offices, are among the most prominent examples.

The symbols gained to the city provided the people living in the city the opportunity to live with their past, contributed to the city in the process of positioning the city as a destination brand, increased the income of the people living in the area by ensuring that tourists from different regions (local-foreign) come to the city, whereby contributing to the development of the region.



Figure 5: States of Odunpazarı houses after the project carried out
Source: <http://www.odunpazari.bel.tr/Projeler.aspx?ID=7>, 16.4.2014

CITY OF LOVE ISLAND AND GONDOLA TOURS

Porsuk Stream that is born with the joining of Bayatçık Creek flowing down the northern slope of Aksu Mountain, and Kızıлтаş Stream flowing down the northern slope of Murat Mountain is the longest (448 km) branch of Sakarya River. It is a river that literally divides Eskişehir province into two and where people can swim in and go fishing in the 1960s. However, the pollution that increased in time made it hard to even pass the river by, let alone go fishing and swimming in it. Porsuk Stream, which became a place where litters were dropped and sewage was constantly mixed, has become a place where mosquitoes reproduced, that emit bad smells and threats human health.



Figure 6: Photographs showing the state of Porsuk stream before the cleaning works.
Source: www.sakarya.com.tr (16.4.2014)

Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality started a work for Porsuk Stream which became quite a problematic place both with its look and the threats against the health of the citizens, and first ensured the improvement and cleaning of the stream and then began to hold excursions on the stream for tourists with small ferries. Subsequently, gondola tours similar to those in Venice were started to be held on the stream. Drivers wearing Venetian outfits conduct the gondola tours that start below the historical Tepebaşı Municipality building, and the changing and developing face of Eskişehir can be seen from a different perspective during this gondola tour that lasts approximately 20 minutes. Couples may propose each other in this romantic environment in the gondola tours that has become even more popular in recent years or make surprises by writing various messages on the bridges over the stream. In addition, traditional canoeing races have been held in recent years on Porsuk stream in cooperation with Turkish Canoe Federation.

Furthermore, an islet that can be accessed via gondolas was also constructed in the cleaned Porsuk stream in 2010. This islet was named as the island of “the City of Love” in Eskişehir, where the man of love saying “Eydür bunu bir dem aşksız olmayayım (He saysa I shall not be without love for a moment)” Yunus Emre lies, and it started to host its visitors as of 2010. The most famous celebrity married couples of Turkey were invited to the opening and a second symbolic wedding ceremony was held for them in the islet with the aim of introducing the islet. All around the islet were decorated with love symbols with a vital importance in order to set an image consisting of such keywords as “love”, “affection” and “kindness” during the branding process and it was aimed that couples come and have a romantic time in the islet. In other words, “the islet of the City of Love” provided another important local-cultural value to the city.



Figure 7: The new state of Porsuk Stream cleaned up by Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality and the islet of the City of Love created with gondola excursions for tourists on the stream.

Source: <http://www.eskisehir-bld.gov.tr> (16.4.2014)

FAIRYTALE CASTLE

Sazova, which used to be an empty land in the past, was turned into a Science, Culture and Art park built on an area of 400,000 metre square at the end of a project started by Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality. In the park, where various water sports and activities are held, which includes restaurants, cafes, buffets, picnic areas, a concert area, a relaxation area with an amphitheater, a project called the “Fairy Tale Castle” was also brought to life.

The inside of the building which consists of 26 different towers in total and each of the towers imitates the towers in different spots of Turkey was designed especially for the children. The structure which includes the visuals, stories and characters of the fairy tales told to children became a local-cultural symbol and especially attracts the interest of the tourists.



Figure 8: Images from the Fairytale Castle.

Source: <http://www.eskisehir-bld.gov.tr> (16.4.2014)

THE LOGO OF THE PROCESS

While the Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality has started the process of the creating local-cultural symbols in order to create a city brand figure, it is found out that a logo is need to be drawn in order not only to complete the whole process but also to twell people about it. So that, a logo is created by the Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality and it is started to be used by many different locations around the city and also in the papers or reports which the Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality has used just as the ones that I’ve mentioned for the big cities of the Europe and World. The logo is used with the river of Porsuk, which divides the city into two and city’s one of the most famous symbols. And the slogan says that The “city is

Eskişehir which means a real city, a livable city and the characteristics of a city are in this city, where it is Eskişehir.



Figure 9: “Şehir Eskişehir’dir”. The logo and the slogan that has been created and used by the Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality.

Source: [http://www.eskisehir-bld.gov.tr\(10.08.2015\)](http://www.eskisehir-bld.gov.tr(10.08.2015))

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon tourism at the point reached means a much further meaning than being stuck between the concepts “sea”, “beach”, “seaside” and “summer house”. At this point, the main expectation of the tourists is to meet people with different cultures, people and beliefs other than their and interact with different cultures. Thus, today’s tourism companies promise people the most interesting and extraordinary activities in a geography while making plans.

Just as the concept “brand” is used in order to distinguish consumption products with different properties, images and promises in the market in the eyes of the consumers, the same thing is used for the destinations in today’s tourism world. While many countries in the past positioned themselves as a destination altogether and tried to offer appealing offers to the tourists, this has changed for countries especially covering a wide area and different cultures. Different destinations in the country may have different discourses and make appealing offers to people. At this point, the most important point that we encounter is the phenomenon that the destination will promise. Places that have various geographical beauties and spots of historical importance or that can be deemed the centre of a particular sports activity fulfil these criteria, but what about the destinations that do not have these opportunities?

Eskişehir city came into prominence in this sense with the destination branding process that it started in recent years as a city that does not fulfil the above mentioned criteria, in other words that has neither the summer tourism potential in summer nor a winter tourism potential in winter. The new local-cultural symbols provided to the city both ensured the creation of an Eskişehir city image in the minds of the people who have not yet visited the city and gave a message to those who visited the city, as well as providing a new point-of-view to the locals of the city. In addition to this, the great change that the city went through has now become a subject that is discussed in many conferences, and many cities in Europe have started to take the projects in Eskişehir as a model in order to implement the projects carried out in Eskişehir in their cities as well (http://www.eskisehir-bld.gov.tr/haber_dvm.php?resim_id=348015, 8.5.2014).

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