(Non)Branding Cities and (De)Institutionalization Perspectives: A Case Study of Van, Turkey*

Kentlerin markalaş(ama)ması ve Kurumsallaş(ama)ma Perspektifi: Van Örneği

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ABSTRACT
This study focuses on place branding theory with a case study from a city in Eastern Turkey. The experiences of the city of Van in branding its physical, cultural, and living memories potentially revise the stakeholder approach in tourism branding. The present phenomenological article adopts a qualitative case study, which was based on both face-to-face and phone interviews (n=30) with stakeholders. Although the participants were all enthusiastic about the branding of their city, the study revealed that Western-based approaches such as professional branding organizations and stakeholder-based branding processes do not seem to meet the needs of a community organized around rural "clan" culture and social customs. Rather, in the case study, the brand image had to be agreed upon by all groups involved and the spatial and temporal contexts had to be considered. This paper offers suggestions which will aid policymakers and tourism professionals in place branding in the context of emerging economies.
Keywords: City branding, (non)branding, collaboration, culture, place, Eastern Turkey (Van city)

ÖZ
Bu çalışma, yer markalaşma teorisine odaklanarak Türkiye'nin Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi'nde yer alan bir şehir olan Van'da yürütülmüştür. Van kentinin paydaş yaklaşımıyla markalaşma sürecinde fiziksel, kültürel ve yaşayan hafızasına ilişkin deneyimlerini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma nitel araştırma stratejisiyle fenomenolojik desende, paydaşlarla hem yüz yüze hem de telefon görüşmelerine (n=30) dayanan nitel bir vaka çalışmasını benimsemektedir. Araştırma bulguları, katılımcıların hepsi şehirlerinin markalaşması konusunda istekli olduklarını ifade etmiş olmalarına rağmen, profesyonel markalaşma organizasyonları ve paydaş temelli markalaşma süreçleri gibi batı temelli yaklaşımların, kırsal "aşiret" kültürü ve gelenekleri etrafında örgütlenmiş bir topluluğun ihtiyaçlarını karşılamadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu örnek olay incelemesine rağmen, marka imajı ilgili tüm gruplar tarafından kabul edilerek mekânsal ve zamansal bağlamlar dikkate alınmalıdır. Bu makale, gelişmekte olan ekonomiler bağlamında politika yapıcılara ve turizm profesyonellerine yer markalaşması konusunda yapıcı öneriler sunmaktadır.
Anahtar kelimeler: Kent markalaşması, markalaş(ama)ma, işbirliği, kültür, mekan, Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi, Van, Türkiye

INTRODUCTION

Tourism studies literature has long recognized the importance of branding. Yet, there remains a considerable difference between the tourism branding of wealthy and emerging economies. This is mainly due to a divergence in the socio-cultural makeup of these societies, which is an essential driver of branding. Therefore, it is likely that cities in developing countries experience specific challenges in branding. Many cities in Europe and other parts of the world use branding strategies that employ professional organizations, such as Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and City Visiting Centres (CVCs), to drive city branding (Frandsen and Winni, 2013). Branding has also become an important concept for emerging economies, many of which rely on tourism income.

Branding studies in the extant literature are often situated in the fields of business and management (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997; Hankinson, 2007; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2006) and socio-cultural studies (Warren and Dinnie, 2018; Tilaki and Hedayati, 2015; Hollinshead, 1999). The former disciplines tend to rule out the socio-cultural concepts in the corporate firms and organizational spheres which is usually part of a larger geographical context. However, this approach is regarded by some as insufficient (Hall, 2007). Socio-cultural studies, in contrast, have focused principally on critical issues in managing the branding process and its social, cultural and historical associations with "power" and "uneven development" (Hall, 2017; Huggins and Thompson, 2015). However, one critical issue which has yet to be addressed is how branding has been (de) institutionalized by local organizations. This question centres the external challenges facing the broader institutional framework in the branding process. Addressing this gap, this study attempts to understand Turkey's detailed branding model, assess some of the potential obstacles to successful branding, and also reconcile branding outcomes with the "socio-cultural traits" and "collective memories" of the city of Van.

Stakeholder theory does not account for the informal relationships that emerge in the institutional environment, for example, entrenched historical and cultural attributes (Seo and Creed, 2002; Beritelli, 2011). Therefore, this paper deploys a structuralist perspective to observe the nature of the relationships among branding actors in Van and elucidate the socially-structured relationships among the city's internal organizations. More specifically, this paper uses neo-institution theory (Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2014), the principal intervention of which is to assess both formal and informal challenges while engaging with local actors during the institutionalization of city branding (Karhunen, 2008).

Like many countries, Turkey has disseminated a strategy to bring branding into the tourism sector with its Tourism 2023 Strategic Plan that aims to establish regional and local branding offices. The case of Turkey's adaptation model is broadly instructive and helps us to better understand how *local* organizations *locally* implement state policy. Therefore, in the penultimate part of this paper, a revised theoretical model of the branding process is provided. Additionally, this study's primary theoretical contribution to the literature is to combine neo-institutionalization theory with place branding theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place Branding and Collaboration

In place branding theory, seminal works in the literature have theorized the complex relationship between place branding (or its variant terminology) and culture. Firstly, place management focuses on the sub-subjects of stakeholder relationships, attributes and associations (Mitchell et al. 1997). Secondly, it discusses the management of rural areas' branding (Jamal and Stronza, 2009; Todd, Leask and Ensor, 2017). Finally, it engages with the topics of visitor perceptions and local-community involvement (Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker, 2013; Zenker, Braun, and Petersen, 2017).

Given that branding is closely related to management and its relevant concepts, a great deal of research has contributed to developing the stakeholder approach in place branding (Hankinson, 2007; Houghton and Stevens, 2011; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Yet, city branding is not only a generalization of what locals and external stakeholders observe in a place, but is also affected by the relationships between the relevant actors (e.g., city officials, NGOs, tourism professionals) and their perspectives on branding (Reed, 1997). Therefore, national and local brand institutions and ventures (e.g., DMOs, CVBs) have been the foci of some studies in the branding debate (Saraniemi, 2011; Wang, 2008).

The regional or local destination management organizations turns their close attention towards other important branding concepts, like personality, equity, identity, image, symbols and value (Konecnik and Go, 2008; Mossberg and Getz, 2006; Zenker, 2011). Thus, branding is endowed with a specific entity and identity, and city branding is expected to do the same for touristic product marketing at the local level (Cova, 1997). In city branding theory, the importance of interactions in and perceptions of the city were initially identified by Kavaratzis

(2005), whose work emphasized the image of the city, or the "city identity." Kavaratzis suggests that a city's identity evolves through stakeholder interaction, community involvement and, eventually, community development. In particular, interaction theory includes both visitors and locals' views in the branding process (Kavaratzis, 2012).

Stakeholder theory provides a managerial and organizational framework that can help theorize the community, which expects the city to thrive in the branding process (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). However, Seo and Creed (2002, p.242) critique stakeholder theory noting,

> "It is a static and ahistorical model. With its focus limited to the functional and legal dependencies of the firm, it is incapable of capturing the multiple logics and rules that arise from the institutional environment and of handling the dynamics and historical relationships that embed organizations and organizational members."

Though stakeholder theory provides a framework for understanding the "morals and values" in organizational administration (Freeman, 1984), Beritelli (2011, p.610) contends that, "it does not help understand why individuals, stakeholder groups and organizations cooperate or not." This concern was echoed by Hall (2017), who posits that "operational studies are of significance, but they do not then relate to the conceptualizations of governance and meta-governance that underlie intervention and policy choice, i.e. why should the state intervene in one way and not another?"

Neo-Institutional Theory and (De)institutionalism

While stakeholder and cooperation theories are unable to account for broader social systems and their relationship with branding, neo-institutional theory can help explain the wider frameworks of city branding issues. Scholars have argued that a broader social and cultural environment should frame the existing organizational structures and relationships, as well as practices and agencies (Anagnostopoulos, Sykes, Mccrory, Cannata, and Frank, 2010; Chappell, 2006). In the tourism context, city branding might be considered a new institution (McCarthy, 2012). Drawing on Hoffman's (2001) analysis in determining changes in environmental management, Frandsen and Winni (2013, p.213), emphasize that corporate branding is, "also a strategic process where the ongoing adoption (and interpretation) of new institutionalized norms in accordance with the local organizational context are linked to the corporate

identity and reputation management of the organization." Corporate branding, therefore, emerges in a later stage of organizational evolution, as determined by Scott's cognitive-culture pillar theory (2014), thereby entailing a reciprocal relationship between branding and neo-institutionalism.

Yet, the institution is by no means an asset or provision of "social order" when the process of institutionalization/deinstitutionalization is also at play (Scott, 2014, p.58). Therefore, it is important to focus on the institutional framework. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified institutional life as featuring "key suppliers, consumers, regulatory actors and organizations that offer the same products and services" (cited in Adiloğlu-Yalçınkaya and Besler, 2021). More simply, Lavandoski, Albino Silva and Vargas-Sánchez (2014; p.33) asserted that an "institutional framework establishes boundaries which shape interactions between people, organizations and social actors." In this study of (non)branding institutionalization, NGOs (tourism-oriented organizations, business-oriented organizations etc.), the formal authorities (governance, municipalities) and local tourism professionals (hoteliers, travel agents etc.) are considered influential organizations that each have different formal, normative and cultural-cognitive attributes used to rationalize themselves in society. Therefore, this study is not interested in explaining each role, but instead focuses on how the institutional effects occur at various sectors of society (Immergut, 1998, p. 25, cited by Earl, and Hall, 2021). Therefore, some of the effects are directly related to formal norms (e.g., law, agreements, orders), while others include informal conventions (e.g. parochialism, cultural norms, beliefs, values etc.).

A central concept in institutional theory is "legitimacy." It describes how organizations seek justification from institutional actors (including political, social and organizational). Legitimacy can occur in different ways. Scott (2014) proposed a "three-pillar" approach with normative, formative and cognitive-normative themes. Many organizations promote mechanisms and logics within the institutional framework that are aligned with these pillars. The first way legitimacy is achieved is through formative rules. Organizations that employ the formative dimension are principally official organizations that often benefit from coercive power and formal relationships with other organizations. They possess bureaucratic relationships with stakeholders in the institutional environment. In these institutions, symbols and norms are primarily embedded into their structure. The second pillar of legitimacy is normative, representing the general rules and traditions of society, in which some actors embody prevailing societal

values. The final pillar, cognitive-normative, emerged with neo-institutionalism and describes organizations that are deeply embedded in socially-constructed knowledge. Therefore, this last pillar is based on a socially-constructed rule that needs to be recognizable, understandable and culturally supported. This pillar is characterized by "common beliefs." For instance, Yang's (2020) study suggested that having a baby after marriage is an example of a cultural-cognitive belief of the social institution. As neo-institutionalism does not refer to agency, actors are relevant in neo-institutionalism because "Organizations are considered collective actors" (Lowndes, 2010, p.67). Actors' cognitive fields and attributes, particularly socio-cultural attributes, interact externally to change the organizational role and performance. For example, a case study from Ireland (McCarthy 2012), suggested that regeneration in the institutionalization of Ireland's cultural tourism was driven by social entrepreneurship.

The framework of deinstitutionalization was initially developed by Oliver (1992). The present study analyses the institutionalization practices of city branding in the Turkish context (**Figure 1**). This study introduces the concept of "non-branding" and engages in a detailed analysis of why collaboration fails when socio-historical and cultural perspectives are lacking. Therefore, non-branding might be considered a form of deinstitutionalization, which is another essential premise of neo-institutional theory (Scott, 2014; Zucker, 1987; Oliver, 1992). Scott (2014) refers to deinstitutionalization as "the processes by which institutions weaken and disappear" (p.166). Oliver (1992) posits a three-fold approach (namely, "functional, political, and social") to ascertain the reasons for deinstitutionalization in organizations. While operating pressure aims to ascertain the changes in increasing goal clarity and technical features, political and social changes are related to the relationship between the organization and environment (Oliver, 1992, p.579). In Oliver's framework, concepts are not confined to intra-organization relations, but rather are also deeply embedded in the interaction between environment and organization (Aksom and Tymchenko, 2020). Therefore, city branding needs to be revisited. The contextualization of "non-branding" will be analysed with the socially constructed concept of deinstitutionalization in the context of a developing country. Overall, this paper aims to fill this gap in the literature using neo-institutional theory's deinstitutionalization framework, including legitimacy and the factors driving the changes in organizations of the institutional field.

METHODOLOGY

Van as a case study

Lake Van is an area with significant cultural and geomorphological features that can serve as tourist attractions (**Figure 2**). In the past, the region had a mix of Turkish, Persian, Armenian, Kurdish and Arab elements in its history. It is also home to some highly distinctive and unusual landscape features, including formations like fairy chimneys and travertines. Drawing on its historical and cultural history, both tangible and intangible, it undoubtedly possesses characteristics similar to those of some European cities. To be more specific: a) Van has held cultural interactions in its geography throughout history, especially the historical city of Tuspa, the long-time capital of the Urartu empire, which lies in the Van region (Pınarcık, 2014); b) the Urartu civilization built a number of irrigation channels to supply water for its fields, vineyards and gardens. These important structures from the Urartu civilization survived to this day (Okur, 2017). Likewise, other nations living in the Van basin have also left behind impressive historical artifacts that can attract tourism to the region.
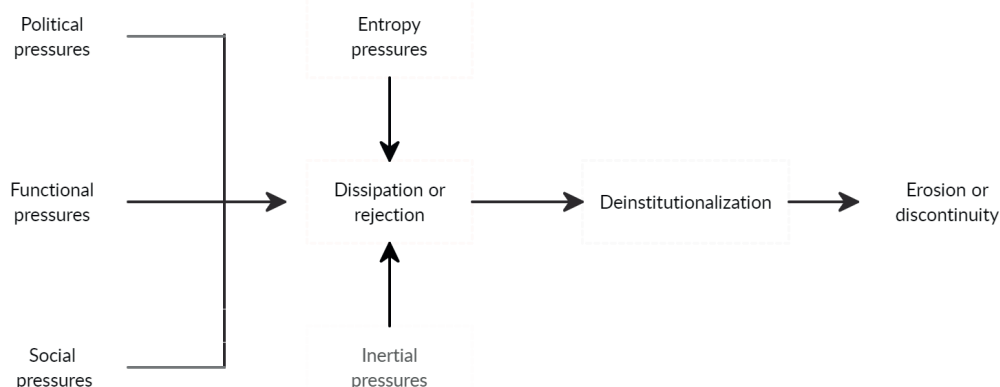
Figure 1: Oliver's (1992) model of deinstitutionalization (adopted from Oliver page 567).
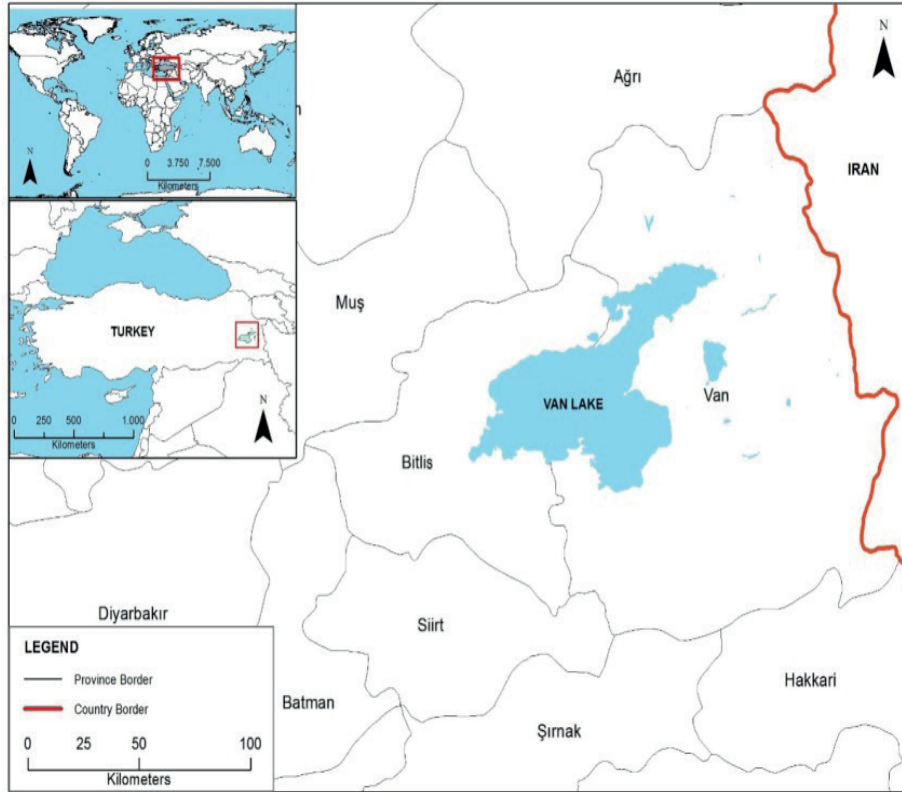
Figure 2: A map of the city of Van in Eastern Turkey.

Context: Place Branding in Turkey's tourism industry

This study illustrates the ways in which tourism and city branding operate in Turkey. While not a comprehensive account, it does provide a synopsis of the principal issues affecting place branding. A white paper entitled "Tourism's Future by 2023" was published by the Turkish government in 2007 and outlines action plans to be initiated by 2013. One of the suggestions was to develop branded cities and tourism cities. However, it is still unclear how tourism and city branding operate in Turkey, not least because no professional institution or structure was established to oversee the branding process. This "top-down" approach resulted in an unsuccessful and unsustainable branding process which disregarded continuity, local synergy and teamwork (Özkul, 2017). The Ministry of Tourism and Culture is responsible for Turkey's tourism policies and strategies through its local connections with city governance and its sub-institutions (tourism and culture bureaus). Yet, none of these institutions have a budget for investment in tourism. Instead, their budget is mainly used for the advertisement of local touristic assets in the form of maps, brochures, booklets, websites, etc. Therefore, some cities (e.g. Antalya, İzmir, Gaziantep) operate their city branding targets with the support of local municipalities and, occasionally, the City Business Chambers (Özkul, 2017). In two destinations—Kayseri's

Erciyes winter tourism resort and Şanlıurfa's DMO—the professional destination management system is supported by the local city municipality. Şanlıurfa (now famous due to the site of Göbeklitepe) has a diverse and novel governance structure compared to other cities.

While municipalities have played a significant role in the branding practices of cities, some cities in Turkey (e.g. Gaziantep, Afyonkarahisar, Çanakkale, Kayseri) benefit from consultancy companies that help establish branding policies and practices. Yet, others attempt to brand through their own efforts. From this context, this study investigates a city in a less-developed region of the country to understand the reasons for branding entropy which can emerge in a geographical context with a complex historical background and politically divided population.

Data and Method

Due to the influence of the business and marketing tradition, it is not surprising that positivist perspectives have dominated the branding literature (Hosany et al. 2006; Anholt, 2006). However, more recent studies have turned their attention to a post-positivist paradigm, instead emphasizing the depth of relationships among collaborators and their interaction with each other using more

qualitative work (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2007; Warren and Dinnie, 2018; Tilaki and Hedayati, 2015). For example, the interrelationships among the stakeholders of the hallmark events of the Edinburgh Festival were phenomenologically studied within the context of tourism management (Todd et al., 2017).

The present study has also benefited from phenomenological research designed to understand key actors' roles in the branding experience. Van is a city in Eastern Anatolia that has initiated a city branding process. The city has recently experienced a more "holistic" management approach compared to other parts of the country. This study reflects the views of both appointed mayors (hereafter referred to as trustees) and the city's key stakeholders (NGOs, the University, "champions", prominent bureaucrats, mayors, etc.). Both selective and snowball sampling methods were employed to reach the relevant city branding actors as well as individuals knowledgeable about the city's past and present tourism potential.

In total, thirty interviews were carried out with four groups of relevant people in the city. The first group consists of the City Officials (CO) (11): Three of which (two being boroughs) are trustee mayors ("T-CO"). The remaining CO interviewees have long-standing experience in the city council or with managing the city's institutions. The second group is made up of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (10), which represent civic society in Van [the City Business Chamber, a women's rights NGO, the Association of Tourism and Travel Agencies (TURSAB), the local branch of the Kitchen Chef Association and four NGOs representing local clans (in Turkish, "aşiret")]. The third group consists of "Tourism Professionals" (TPs) (6): hotel managers, owners of travel agencies, and a tour guide representative. The final group is composed of city celebrities (3): the legendary CEO of the city's football club, the former head of the Business Chamber, and the wife of a well-known former mayor. The interviews were conducted between 2018 and 2020. Most interviews were done face-to-face, however, due to COVID-19, some interviews were conducted via phone. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in Turkish and then translated into English. Finally, the qualitative interview data was thematically analysed using a deductive approach which was framed by Oliver's (1992) deinstitutionalization theory (namely political, social and functional pressures).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Pressures

A place brand is like a reputation, image, impression, or perception among those who care about it, such as citizens, potential investors and visitors. This, therefore, creates issues when the brand identity (how the 'owners' of the brand want it to be perceived) conflicts with brand image (how the brand *is actually* perceived). This section focuses on political pressures, mainly related to the actors' backgrounds, on formal and informal organizations.

The first group is city administrators, whose experience mainly involves governing a province. However, with the latest political changes in Turkey, they have simultaneously become mayors of the provincial capital. With this approach, in the city of Van and its provinces, most of the elected mayors were removed from their positions and replaced by either the local governor or one of the provincial deputy governors, who then became a trustee. This approach allows the trustees to establish a connection between the central government and local municipalities by bringing all roles under one umbrella and bridging the divergent socio-cultural structure present in Eastern Turkey. All trustees suggested that "urbanization" and "belonging to the city" were key factors needed for the city brand and branding process to be achieved. They felt that branding could be conscientious and respectful by involving the local people in city life. People's wellbeing (factors such as security, secure income, and happiness) depends on the city being branded with its infrastructure as well as its symbols and values.

> When we question the dream level of the average young person, I find it very wrong for people to accept guaranteed labour or minimum wage. In other words, you cannot create a great civilization from a society that has lost its motivation for life (T-CO2/M).

> A city brand reminds me of Paris, yet one has to look inside. It is one of the most irritating cities because Paris is where the most homeless live. But for myself, the place where you feel happy while living there is the brand city (T-CO3/M).

The legitimacy of formal institutions is articulated through formative rules, which the local people regularly validate. It shows that formal institutions exert effort in developing the city's infrastructure (thematic streets, local restaurants, recreational areas) as well as the development of its culture (e.g. thematic street projects, accessible café projects, education centres for women, etc.). This closely aligns with the AKP government's neo-liberal policy, which has mainly focused on redeveloping the city's infrastructure as well as the city's vicinity and recreational areas.

Although the city's physical environment has changed considerably over the last five years or so, social-cultural projects have not been given adequate attention. Therefore, despite the locals' participation and loyalty being crucial to the branding process, they have not been sufficiently involved. The lack of a collaborative approach is evident in how the actors coercively assign duties and make decisions. Although their educational background, relevant experience in managing cities, and knowledge of city branding are internally legitimate, the actors in formal institutions seem to fit branding to the central government's political logic, which can lead to dissonance among the organizations.

Therefore, the recent approach of trustee appointment seems to have created conflict amongst the organizations. This is reminiscent of Oliver's (1992) political dissensus theory. For example, one participant asserted that "*this trustee approach is not sustainable for the city's bright future*" (NGO1). This was also supported by a tourism professional whose view was that the municipality is vital in the branding process and that the process should be managed by locals who are more knowledgeable about the city's expectations and values.

The participants who are not bureaucrats—mainly having experience in public and civic organizations and/or serving as mayors—underscore that the brand and branding should be an essential part of the city planning process. This is referred to as the "branding with planning approach." The trustees' opinions regarding urbanization also echo this approach, namely the importance of the city master and development plans:

> But as a municipalist, planning the city with ergonomic ideas, with the correct use of its resources as well as the quality and capacity of the city's aesthetics and investments. I understand this when I say the brand city, and I want it to be understood as such (CO6/M).

Unlike formal institutional actors' views, the third most referred theme is the meaning of the city's symbols, which are both tangible and intangible assets. These matter to the "place-making" and "geographical imagination" approaches in city branding (Lew, 2017). Meaning here is principally related to meeting the psychological and physical needs of the visitor's first impressions.

> Brand means perception in the social imagination. And according to this perception, either a force of attraction or a push is an obstacle. For example, Iran is a place where branded cities have crucial things in their past. When you say Shiraz, you remember its past. When you say Ardabil, it is Shah İsmail's hometown. When you say Geylan, it is an enormous city (CO2/M).

A "top-down" approach might cause problems (Scott, 2014), not least because the institutionalization of the branding process deserves a sustainable process, and a variety of actors in formal organizations mediating the process of branding. This is also principally related to the coercive relationship amongst government-oriented organizations. One of the leading institutions promoting local development is the Regional Development Agency. Because it is directly connected to the Development Ministry in Ankara, it tends to work closely with the central government's representatives. This can lead to success in some cases, for example, at Kayseri's Erciyes Mountain Ski Resort where management practices have flourished. However, Van has dissonant voices challenging the 'trustee' approach. The local tourism professionals raised the point that the appointed COs are working towards short-term aims for the city's tourism. For example, TP4 underlined that

> when a trustee is appointed to the city, his thoughts must be followed as a new development strategy for the city until a new one is appointed. Considering that branding is a long-term process, short-term targets are not useful and sustainable for the branding of a city. They should hear the voice of the locals and what we would like to achieve.

Deinstitutionalization can result in the collapse of the system (Oliver, 1992). While the city was discovered by Western tourists in the past as a place of "Eastern authenticity" and romanticism, the threat of terrorist activities and the First Gulf War caused the city to lose its tourism networks with Western countries' "highbrow" tourists. The NGO representatives also believed that city branding is not just marketing and advertisement, underscoring that the town has lost its image and needs to be rebuilt with its own meanings and values.

> While it was almost negligible in terms of promotion and marketing opportunities in the 1970s, nobody should link that lack of promotion to the number of European tourists coming to the city today! (LG1/F).

Overall, the professionals with bureaucratic experience tend to support the idea of healthy urbanization, noting that the well-being of local people and a sense of belonging are essential parts of city branding. However, these particular legitimizations of

organizations are in conflict with those of local people and their informal representatives.

Functional Pressures

The establishment of local branding (tourism) offices was outlined in *Tourism 2023*, the strategic report detailing the government's vision. Given that the branding process is informally assigned to the Regional Development Agencies, many tourism authorities maintain reservations. The technical process or functional considerations need to be considered in the branding process (Oliver, 1992). In this study, the lack of goals ("identity") related to the misuse of social and cultural capital is often raised by the participants. This leads to unclear aims and working mechanisms on how the branding might be institutionalized in the cities. Since the goal (image, identity) is always the principal matter for branding, the lack of a precise mechanism seems to be one of the most significant challenges facing the city's tourism branding efforts. Here, the environment-organization relationship of the institutionalization of tourism was tempered by historical and geopolitical risks in the region (e.g., Iraq-Iran War, First Gulf Crisis, Syrian unrest), which sporadically interrupt the tourism activities in the area.

Over the last twenty years, neo-liberal conservatism has become the government's domestic policy. In comparison, Turkey's highly vibrant touristic cities such as İzmir, İstanbul and Antalya, with the power of cultural heritage and hallmark events, have made significant progress in branding. In contrast, Van recently banned its annual youth music festival ("gezginfest") due to the protests of conservative NGOs. It seems that there is a close connection between formal and informal organizations. Yet, this shows that the NGOs' casual relationships with the local legal authorities emphasize the non-established legitimacy of institutionalization amongst the organizations. This demonstrates how the conservative nature of society creates social pressures on the formal organizations.

However, this issue is not only related to societal power, but also the central government's authority. Yet, it results in a loss of legitimation for the institutionalization process and is a significant obstacle eroding institutionalism in branding. The key actors of this process might be the tourism professionals who are inclined to have a more professional structure and network amongst the organizations in the institutional field. Again, this underscores the lack of unity among the NGOs in the city as well as the fact that the local authority took responsibility for projecting a city brand without consultation.

Many branding processes in thriving cities are related to collaborative management of the branding process between various groups (Kavaratzis, 2008). The city of Van has a unique cultural and social heritage. Many churches still remain from the Armenian community who used to live in this region. Some traditions contribute to the co-creation of tourism and enhance the "niche" market (e.g., local rugs, silver niello art, cheese) as well as authenticity (local cheese bazaar, cheeses made with herbs, tea houses). In ancient times, the city was the capital of the Urartian civilization. In the Ottoman period, the population of the city was mainly Armenian (44%), Muslim Turks and Kurds (5%), Gypsies (3%) and others (1%) (Hakan, 2020). Despite this diversity and prosperity, the city entered a traumatic stage after the First World War in 1915. Thus, the discontinuity of social and cultural capital might hinder the city from focusing on a clear goal for the institutionalization of branding, something which could improve the city's future. As one participant pointed out:

> This situation also appears when we look at the economic field. Is Van a city based on tourism? Agriculture? Livestock? Industry? Or what? Van is undergoing a sociological trauma with an unstable, unformed urban identity.

In contrast to collaborative branding, the results show a competition amongst the city's organizations. The dominant attitude is one of "*I am better than anyone else and egos are in the forefront*" (NGO1). This issue has also been echoed by all of the tourism professionals, who are also dissatisfied with this situation in the city. TP1 suggested that the main problems might be related to the feudal habits of some communities. Achieving a certain level of financial power to become a community leader or chief ('Ağa' in Turkish) seems to be the principal aim of many individuals in the city. This is supported by NGO6's opinion: "Van has more than 700 NGOs. If only half of them come together, we could sort out any problem of the city".

Social Pressures

Collaboration and Culture

Tosun (2000) underscored how developing countries are struggling to set up collaboration processes. This study also investigated why there was little collaboration and cooperation in city branding in the case of Van. Given that branding is the sum of both identity and images, many interviewees suggested that "city identity" and "images" were the main problems facing

the city's branding process. They underlined the lack of collaboration among the cities' key stakeholders. Most participants attributed a successful branding process to collaboration and bringing the city's key actors together. However, achieving this in the local setting seems daunting because society and the local community face socio-historical challenges.

> Therefore, the concept of vanity, whose boundaries and principles are internalized by society in general, has not developed around a culture of cooperation and solidarity. Instead, these motivations have been influenced by the more dominant tribal, family, and sub-spatial belongings-- not unity, but diversity. Every sub-sociological segment has an image of Van and a motivation to promote it. Therefore, we have a journey based on "contrast" rather than "solidarity" (CO2/M).

Three themes emerged to explain why the stakeholder approach was not working and what prevented stakeholders from collaborating. The first is the political divergence between two groups in the city. One group supports the country's ruling party (Justice and Development or AK Party), while the other consists of members of the pro-Kurdish party (HDP). The division between these two groups is mainly rooted in the idea that "nationalism" has always been used in opposition to the Kurdish people, who are stereotyped as wanting to divide the country into two parts. The dominant group in the city now is Kurdish Muslims. Although most are supporters of the pro-Kurdish party, this does not necessarily entail that all favour separatism.

> Two political poles are felt very sharply in the city: the HDP supporters (the majority in the area) and the country's leading party (AK Party for the past 18 years, but previously ANAP, FP, MHP, DYP, etc.) have drawn hard boundaries that are difficult to overcome. The culture of acting together is therefore not developing (CO4/M).

In the past, the Armenian community was a significant force in the city, and the city's inhabitants lived in peace despite their cultural diversity. Today few Armenians live in the area. Nevertheless, TPs, in particular, emphasize that the city should be open to "diaspora" tourism with reconstruction of the town's old city. This attitude is also observed in the activities of non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, pro-environmental groups, etc. It demonstrates how people's self-

interests tend to override politics. Many interviewees pointed out that putting personal advantages first seems to be a common factor amongst the wider society. However, it appears that this unified structure is not confined to a specific term or time in the city's history. It has probably been true since the 1990s when security became a concern in the region:

> In the last decade, this culture of non-commonality has divided the people into two as supporters of the government and supporters of HDP, and the city's NGOs and other civilian structures have also entered a process of structuring in this sense (NGO2/M).

The second issue is clannism ('aşiret' in Turkish). Today, the city has been populated mainly by Kurdish Muslims, whose social structure has rapidly transferred from rural life, resulting in a divergent socio-cultural form of urban life. This led many to still live according to pastoral cultural practices in the city. Particularly after a 2011 earthquake, Van experienced considerable migration from the surrounding areas, which are much less developed than the city. This hindered the city's urbanization.

In the cosmopolitan cities of Turkey (İstanbul, İzmir, Antalya), identity and belonging are mainly shaped by a supra-identity, leading to pro-environmentalist, gender inequality (LQGBT, FEMEN) and culture-oriented NGOs. In Van, however, a rural-informed culture has brought about a transformation of a different nature, as the names of the NGOs simply mirror those of the clans (e.g. Küresinliler, Burikiler, Ertoşiler, Gewdanlar, etc.). The interviews with NGOs revealed that they aim to keep their culture alive and support their local communities economically and socially. For example, the sub-culture oriented NGO9 emphasized that they provide scholarships, particularly for female university students. This implies that networking is the main source of social capital in the region.

The final matter is related to becoming a community leader and, going forward, actually taking on a leading role. As explained above, collaboration is a strategic issue in society, and for these small groups, it is probably related to education, skills, and attributes in the community. One of the participants explained that after successfully achieving the job, leaders do not recognise the team's role in success. This causes unsuccessful results or for the team to break up entirely. Alternatively, team members may leave the team instead of sharing the responsibility. Then, there is no one left in the group during the second stage of the initiative. This might support the view of learning actors in the organizations for institutionalization.

Even though coherence amongst organizations is a necessary logic of institutional practice, political and cultural divergence amongst communities is reflected in the city's places. Therefore, branding turns into a kind of territorial power relationship leading to intra-clan competition. For instance, the Brukan clan (Kurdish-origin) originally migrated from Russia. The people settled in the eastern part of the city, where a university was established on land donated by this clan. Families of this community largely populate the Tusba province. This is not an atypical case, as similar examples can be found in other neighbourhoods (e.g. Yalım Erez-Gewdan; İstasyon-Burukiler; Süphan and Selahaddin Eyyubi - Ertoşi). The city is defined by geographically segregated areas:

> As I said, especially the security problem, unrestricted immigration from the surrounding provinces, the migration of the people who make up the core of the city, the mosaic of the city, but who lack a culture of cooperation has started to damage this cooperation, this spirit of the city (NGO2/M).

Nevertheless, compared to other clans in the region, people of the Tusba clan are well-educated and assign cultural prominence to education. They are very active in local elections, leading most of the municipality mayors to come from this area. This shows how political views are secondary. Regardless of which party they vote for, what is important is networking with and seeking to harness the clan as a source of social capital. This clannism causes disagreement about issues in local communities.

> Primitive forms of solidarity brought about by tribal structures or large family orders or self-help practices belonging to traditional rural living areas such as villages have become the social norm in the city. A higher social phenomenon that will strengthen the tendency of "cooperation" or "partnership" outside the traditional sociological fields would be a sense of urbanity in which individuals can establish a connection with the place they live in and their future (CO2/M).

Cohen, E., and Scott A. Cohen (2012) emphasized that many Western-oriented theories need to be critically analysed when assuming implications for and adaptability to non-Western societies. Neo-institutional theory's contribution to the field is essential for the performance and adaptability of DMOs. Nonetheless, it requires some local adaptations for branding to be welcomed in non-Western societies and emerging economies. This study principally shows that the effect of a society's socio-

historical and cultural attributes can temper the collaboration of key stakeholders, even in large cities. As Hakan (2020) notes, the Armenian community led the business and trade life of the city in the past. Therefore, another factor obstructing cooperation could be the discontinuity of the historical economic structure and lifestyle of society. For example, the city of Mardin, which has several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, has created "telkari art" and "churches" with the support of the local Süryani community, who are mainly Christian and widely known for their silver art, winemaking, and architecture.

In contrast, Muslims in Van were more inclined to earn their living from farming, raising livestock, or civil service. When the Armenians left the country, many economic sectors such as silver, rugs, and border-trade lost momentum. The repercussions continue to reverberate through the city's social and economic life. There is still great potential for the city's branding with its cultural diversity and symbols (the remains of the Urartian empire, the old city, Akdamar Church, etc.), and Van can overcome this trauma within its social structure. Antalya, İzmir and İstanbul are economically driven by business and trade—their economic infrastructures support the economy while tourism is built on the culture. Branding is essentially a marketing term. Therefore, a strong business culture seems to more easily adapt to the keywords related to branding: collaboration, stakeholder, image, etc.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Conclusions

This study has comparatively and critically evaluated issues related to city brands and branding using a case study from Eastern Turkey. While Turkey has made comparative progress with branding in the western part of the country, this paper's attention focused on how the eastern city of Van approached branding over the last two decades. It provides a detailed understanding of the extent of an organization's branding practice in a more rural socio-cultural context. This paper comparatively examined why the city deinstitutionalized. Given the successful results of a few branding cities, the institutionalization of branding can be achieved with the collaboration of formal and normative powers in the cities. Branding is a mechanism for control of the legal regulations and informal power. In this case, the latter is an informal power represented by the regional development agencies with both financial and human resources for the cities. Therefore, in most cases, branding provides support in developing local
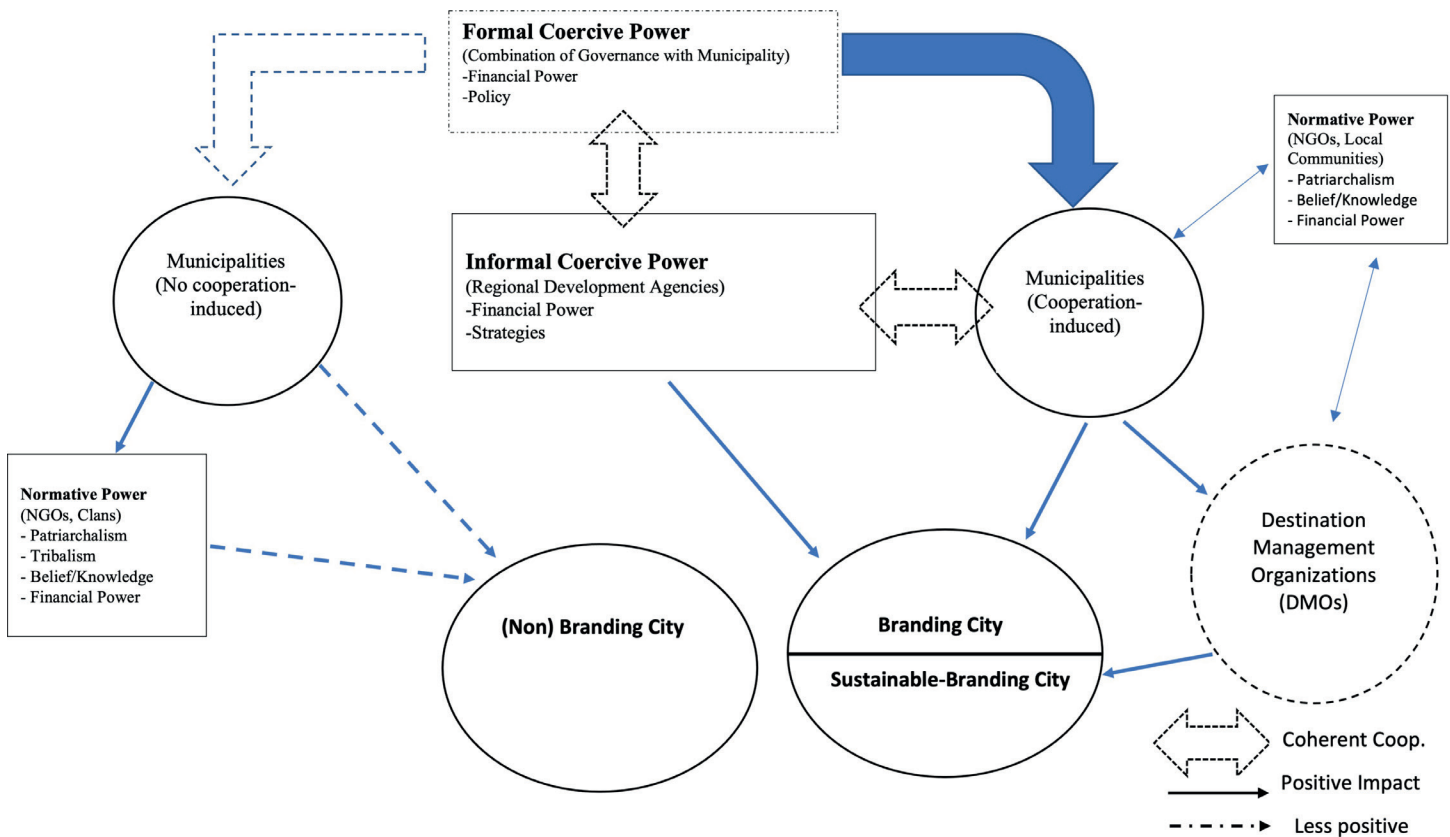
Figure 3: A suggested theoretical model of the paper

infrastructure in cities. Yet, municipalities are also at the heart of project development in the branding process, as they represent civic society through local elections and normative legitimacy. In this case, the municipality was ignored by the central government by transferring all of its power into a new system of trustees which was thought to be more effective in the branding process.

While this system came with some advantages, this intervention also created a loss of connection between society, its representatives in NGOs, and the formal coercive power. In turn, this resulted in deinstitutionalization, or "non-branding." Therefore, social culture and arbitrary rules have created a dilemma for forging "togetherness" and "belonging." Since the central government is more powerful than the municipal actors (e.g. in Ankara, İstanbul, Eskişehir, Antalya), city branding was undertaken using *only* the *perceived* image of the city. Yet, in Van, the sub-cultural identities within society seem to be interrupting the urbanization process, which needs a professional structure and is an integral part of the collaborative branding process. Instead, social capital prevails and Turkey in general is

still heavily reliant on social networking. This is not just the case in less developed cities, but also true for large cities.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Oliver's 1992 model has informed much work on deinstitutionalization. The model has shaped the empirical findings of this study and ethnographic fieldwork, governmental policy documents, and informal interviews with the DMOs. While intra-organizational features are the primary driver for Western theory, this study attempted to conceptualize an environment-social relationship by integrating comprehensive policy with socio-cultural attributes. This intervention primarily shows that even the formal sector, with its coercive power, cannot always legitimise itself for branding institutionalization. In this context, the municipal government with its normative power seems to be more effective in branding institutionalization in Van, and perhaps, elsewhere, given that local governance is too dependent on the government which holds the power to shape tourism strategies and policies. This implies that DMOs's structure is detached from the "top-down" approach. In other

words, DMOs are more prone to operate and be applicable to a decentralized management approach rather than "top-down" management and/or governance approach. This suggests that DMOs might be needed to legitimatize local organisations for a successful branding process.

In contrast to corporate branding approaches, which are slightly more professionalised and homogenous, the adoption of Western-style approaches might cause "isomorphism" in organizations. As long as the organization is successful in the more "social-capital-driven" societies, this branding approach needs to be revisited and adapted accordingly. Yet, as evidenced by this case, formal institutions and their sub-mechanisms have to work together to remove particularity and clannism by supporting the individual powers of civic society. In the branding process, the local authorities should not underestimate the role of women in the process. In many cases, the entrepreneurship of actors might change the cornerstones of institutionalization. However, the socio-cultural attributes of society might also form an obstacle in the agency of women in entrepreneurship. This study investigates the particular legitimacy of organizations which might play a prominent role in the touristic branding process to show the effect of the broader socio-cultural context in the institutionalism of city branding.

Future Research

In the absence of social and cultural capital, local communities could not be proactive in the decision-making process. Therefore, their formal and informal representatives should not be underestimated in this process. A successful brand is a widely agreed identity of the city's stakeholders. Thus, each individual in the city can contribute to the branding process so long as human agency has been upheld. This might be facilitated through social entrepreneurship amongst women and the integration of NGOs into the decision-making process. Therefore, branding needs to be recognized as an institution which is culturally and socially saturated.

This study has used a holistic approach to understand deinstitutionalization in city branding. While perhaps limited by the single-country focus, Turkey's experience is valuable as it has significant variations in its socio-cultural landscape as well as long-standing experience with an innovative tourism sector. There are wider lessons for emerging economies and an empirical study of this model should be tested in different countries and destinations.

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