

ŞEHİR SAKİNLERİNİN KENTSEL MARKA ALGISI: GAZİ MAĞUSA VE GİRNE (KUZEY KIBRIS) ÖRNEĞİ¹

RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CITY BRANDING: THE CASE OF FAMAGUSTA AND KYRENIA (NORTHERN CYPRUS)

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Öz

Şehir markası literatürü, çeşitli Avrupa ülkelerinde nispeten olumlu marka imajına sahip tanınmış şehirlerin marka imajını ve kamuoyu algılarını yaygın olarak değerlendirmektedir. Ancak göreceli olarak olumsuz bir uluslararası marka imajına sahip ve bilinmeyen bir yerin nasıl algılandığına dair çok az kanıt var. Bu çalışma, bilinmeyen ve nispeten küçük iki şehrin algısını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, nispeten olumsuz bir marka imajına sahip ve az bilinen bir yere odaklanmaktadır. Bu amaçla sadece Türkiye tarafından tanınan Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'nde bulunan Gazimağusa ve Girne seçilmiştir. Çalışmada meslek sahipleri ve lisansüstü öğrenciler olmak üzere 40 sakinle yüz yüze görüşmeler yapılmış; bu şehirlerde yaşayan sakinlerin şehirlerini nasıl algıladıkları sorgulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın siyasi ve ekonomik dezavantajlarına rağmen, Girne ve Gazimağusa sakinlerinin yaşadıkları şehre dair hem olumsuz (örneğin, zayıf şehir planlaması ve altyapı, kirlilik) hem de olumlu çağrışımları (örneğin, deniz, plajlar, limanlar, güvenlik, samimiyeti, sessiz) olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şehir Markası, Mekân Markası, Marka Algısı, Sakinler, Kuzey Kıbrıs

JEL Sınıflaması: Z30, Z10, Z39.

Abstract

City branding literature commonly evaluates the brand image and public perceptions of well-known cities with a relatively positive brand image in various European countries. There is little evidence regarding the perception of an unknown place with a relatively negative international brand image. The objective of this study is thus to uncover the perception of two unknown and smaller cities. To this end, we selected two cities in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus; recognized only by Turkey. The study questions how residents perceive their city. Two groups of residents – professionals versus graduate students – living in Famagusta and Kyrenia are selected, and face-to-face interviews with 40 residents are conducted. The results show that despite the political and economic drawbacks of Northern Cyprus, residents of Kyrenia and Famagusta have both negative (e.g., poor city planning and infrastructure, pollution) as well as positive associations (e.g., the sea, beaches, harbours, safety, friendliness, quiet) with the city in which they live.

Keywords: City Branding, Place Branding, Brand Perception, Residents, Northern Cyprus

JEL Classification: Z30, Z10, Z39.

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1. Introduction

The place is a complex, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted concept. It is a public and political entity, endowed with a particular history, culture, and identity. More precisely, the place is connected to the people who live there, and with their experiences, feelings, and opinions (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Literature on places and place branding commonly evaluates the brand image and public perceptions of well-known cities with a relatively positive brand image, especially, in various western European countries. But they fail to consider how less known and smaller cities with troubled pasts are perceived by their residents. The study of Kasapi and Cela's (2017), which apply a review of the city branding literature, also concludes that research on city branding remains still in its infancy. Kasapi and Cela (2017), similarly, suggest that there is still room for further research in this particular field. Considering this call, this study aims to fill the gap by analysing two cities in Northern Cyprus. More precisely, it focuses on the perceptions of Famagusta and Kyrenia's residents. Understanding residents' perceptions of the city is vital for the development of effective city branding practices (Styliadis, 2016).

Northern Cyprus, with a population of approximately 330,000 people, is situated in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Historically and politically, Northern Cyprus has a troubled past (Barowiec, 2000; Calotychos, 1998), it is the Turkish-speaking part of a divided island and is known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The TRNC was established in 1983 but has been internationally branded as a pseudo-state: "The Greek Cypriot side always places the TRNC in quotation marks or refers to it as the 'Turkish Cypriot pseudo-state'" (Constantinidou and Papadakis, 2001, p.129), a state which has no real independence, or a phantom state, just like Abkhazia and South Ossetia or Nagorno-Karabakh. Northern Cyprus "fell out of the recognized domains of the international law and systems" (Navaro-Yashin, 2003, p.108); and "has been recognised by no member of the international community other than Turkey" (Navaro-Yashin, 2003, p.111). The politically controversial situation of Northern Cyprus has created a lot of negative publicity in both the local and international media, resulting in an unfavourable national brand image. In her anthropologic study, Navaro-Yashin (2003) explained the bizarre situation on the north side of the island by using the "no man's land" (p.107) metaphor. This metaphor has been triggered mainly by the following three reasons:

The first is created by the Republic of Cyprus' internationally recognised government with which it has agreed on a ceasefire since 1974, expanded after 1983. Aggressive measures have been taken by the Greek Cypriot authorities to block Turkish Cypriots from participating in international events. Northern Cypriot organisations and/or institutions operate under an embargo that barely permits them to host any mega-events or international festivals (along the lines of the Cannes Film Festival, Rio Carnival, or the Olympics). Over time, residents of Northern Cyprus become used to reading news stories on how celebrities have been blocked from visiting the north part of the island by the Greek Cypriot authorities in the south. In July 2010, the Greek Cypriot lobby deterred the pop singer Jennifer Lopez from giving a concert at the opening of a hotel in Kyrenia (Star Kibris, 2010). The Spanish singer Julio Iglesias also cancelled a concert in Kyrenia for the same reasons (Haber Kibris, 2010). More recently, the Dutch electro house DJ Hardwell cancelled his stage show in Kyrenia because of the Greek Cypriot pressure on the Dutch Embassy in south Nicosia (Havadis Kibris, 2016).

The second reason for the negative perception arises from the media. Due to the long-standing un-resolved Cyprus issue and the resulting division between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, local and foreign media continue to report on the Cyprus conflict and the failed re-unification attempts. Given that the media is an effective and powerful ideological institution that has an inherent propaganda function that helps to manufacture consent (Hertman and Chomsky, 1988), unfavourable news stories largely serve to brand Northern Cyprus as a place hit by political conflict, corruption, and economic instability, rather than a stunning, alluring, or marvellous sun-sea-sand destination, like Turkey (see, for example, Hamid-Turksoy, Kuipers and Van Zoonen, 2014).

The third factor of the TRNC's negative reputation is the actions of the Turkish Cypriot governmental bodies themselves. The state's policies and their implementation of laws and regulations are accused of being weak and slow, and for lacking management oversight and transparency. It is undeniable that a fair amount of criticism has been levelled at the central and local governments by Northern Cyprus residents. The political isolation of Turkish Cypriots has also influenced the country's economy, as Northern Cyprus has been under economic embargo since its establishment (Günçavdi and Küçükçifçi, 2009). This has meant that the economy is barely able to compete globally in many business fields, and the TRNC sits on the very low-end of the global value chain. In Global Competitiveness Index, Northern Cyprus ranks 121 amongst 139 countries listed (Taşiran and Özoğlu, 2017). More recently, in the 2019-2020 period, Northern Cyprus Competitiveness score was calculated as 51.8, which means that it dropped off to 107th place among 141 countries. Its economy is not integrated into international markets, and its primary industry, tourism, is highly dependent on the Turks (Okumus, Altınay, and Arasli, 2005). Further, very little foreign investment has entered the country since 1983 (see, for example, YAGA, 2017).

The politically contentious position of Northern Cyprus has paved the way for the current negative brand image. This image, undoubtedly, has created an uncomfortable and disadvantaged situation for those who live there and call it home. Northern Cyprus is then, a case par excellence in which to study to what extent residents experience this negative brand image in their everyday lives. For this purpose, we selected Famagusta and Kyrenia for our

case study analysis of how residents in these two cities perceive, feel, and think about their cities. In doing this, to a certain extent, we are answering the call made by Anholt (2007), but we have chosen to apply his recommendations for countries to cities.

[A]ll responsive governments, on behalf of their people, their institutions and their companies, need to discover what the world's perception of their country is, and to develop a strategy to manage it. It is a key part of their job to try to build a reputation that is fair, true, powerful, attractive, and genuinely useful to their economic, political, and social aims, and which honestly reflects the spirit, the genius, and the will of the people (Anholt, 2007, p.2).

In this study, we dive deeply into city branding literature, as its one of the most significant areas of place branding (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Mommas, 2003). City branding has come to occupy an increasingly important position in contemporary place branding, place marketing, and classic marketing literature (cf. Ogustimur and Akturan, 2016; Gartner, 2011; Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Vuignier, 2017). Many theoretical, conceptual, and case studies have attempted to evaluate the Brand Image, identity, and/or perception of popular locations and cities, particularly those located in Europe and North America (see; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2007; Zenker and Beckmann, 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Northover, 2010; Kalandides, 2011; Phillips and Schofield, 2007; Trueman et al., 2007; Laaksonen et al., 2007; Richards and Wilson, 2004), and a few more examples in the Far East (see, for example, Wang et al., 2012; Zhang and Zhao, 2009; Karvelyte and Chiu, 2011), and the Middle East (for a deeper discussion see: Shoaib and Keivani, 2015; Lee and Jain, 2009; Khirfan and Momani, 2013; Herstein and Jaffe, 2008). These studies are largely occupied with measuring, or developing, a positive brand image for large, metropolitan, and ordinary cities. However, the field of city branding has not yet reached an advanced stage, and little known is known about how small, less well-known places with troubled pasts and modest resources, and with a fairly negative international image, can strive to build a brand for themselves. The present study is an attempt to fill this significant gap. Rather than focusing on a known, large place with a relatively positive brand image, we attempt to elaborate the details concerning a small, less known place with a relatively negative brand image. We also reflect on this growing area of research by analysing the following research question: How are Famagusta and Kyrenia is perceived by two different groups of residents, and what do these two places mean to them?

We place residents at the heart of this study since urban residents are “a central stakeholder group in the branding process” (Insch and Florek, 2008, p.146). As Insch (2011) has put it: “Apart from the economic advantages of urban concentration, cities offer their residents many social and emotional benefits, including opportunities to share information, form close social bonds” (p.9). The residents' quality of life and their levels of satisfaction with their city seem to be the ultimate target for city managers and governmental authorities. Considering the negative brand image and politically contested nature of Northern Cyprus, will we find dissatisfied, displeased, and unhappy residents who have negative perceptions of their city, or satisfied, pleased, and happy residents? To the best of our knowledge, no scientific inquiry has yet been made which examines City Brand Perception in Northern Cyprus (for an exception, see, Toros and Gazibey, 2017).

The methodology we adopted for this research is Interpretive (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Cronhaug, 2001), and it is based on in-depth interviews with residents living in Famagusta and Kyrenia. We selected two groups of residents: People with specific professions versus graduate students. We are in agreement with Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013) that: “the residents of places do not constitute a coherent group, but include a multiplicity of groups, that are bound to have varying and conflicting preferences, desires, or attitudes. [...] Students living in the area will have a different set of desirable place attributes than residents at a different life-stage” (p.25). We aim to identify the tangible and intangible elements introduced by these groups, especially, as laid out by Kavaratzis (2004) and Zenker (2011). *Tangibles* are the place's physical aspects (architecture, infrastructure, historic sites, nightlife, housing, etc.); the *Intangibles* constitute the emotional aspects, and the mental and psychological associations that the residents have for their city (also in Zenker and Petterson, 2011). Although the intangible elements are difficult to measure, “they are crucial for a comprehensive picture of the place” (Zenker, 2011, p.48). By focusing on these sets of Tangible and Intangibles, we have been able to identify free brand associations for the two cities under investigation. On one hand, we uncover the resident's perceptions of their city's culture, history, nightlife, and infrastructure, while also delving into their emotional attachments. Given that the marketing literature agrees that a Brand embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes (Simoes and Dibb, 2001), our intention to reveal the Tangible and Intangible elements could help local authorities to draft a roadmap for future city branding in both Famagusta and Kyrenia.

The study begins with an overview of the current state of research in city branding, followed by a brief introduction to the methodology that we used. Section three of the study is dedicated to the findings and our concluding remarks.

2. The concept of city branding and the perceptions of places by residents

The phrase City Branding generates around 235,000,000 Google results (last checked 8th of July 2021). While many of these hits are not directly related to city branding as an academic discipline, the number demonstrates the rising importance given to the field by consultants, politicians, practitioners, students, advertisers, media owners, municipal officials, and tourism-related organisations (e.g., hoteliers and travel agencies).

The current state of city branding research has its roots in the classic concepts of branding (see, for example, Wheeler, 2017; Johnson, 2016) and traditional marketing practices (see, for example, Kavaratzis, 2007; Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2007; Morgan et al., 2002; Oguztimur and Akturan, 2016; Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Lee and Jain, 2009). It is widely accepted that contemporary branding and marketing practices play an important role in shaping perceptions and feelings about cities (Anholt, 2007; Morgan et al., 2002; Kavaratzis, 2009). Attractive logos, slogans, events, and promotional advertising campaigns are all tools used to help in creating perceptions of cities (Giovanardi, Lucarelli and Pasquinelli, 2013). However, as Kavaratzis has famously argued, these types of “promotional activity constitute only a fraction of the whole process” (2007, p.695). This fact is also highlighted in Ashworth and Kavaratzis's (2009) study. As city brands are far more sophisticated (Chan and Marafa, 2016), and they are not homogeneous entities, the brands cannot be set and fixed, and are never final. They are fluid and constantly being reconstructed (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015).

There is notable agreement across the literature that “every inhabited place on earth has a reputation, just as products and companies have brand images” (Anholt, 2007, p.7). However, contrary to product brands (cf., Aaker, 2010), city brands have an organic nature. In their study, which aimed to build a theoretical framework for developing city brands, Kavaratzis (2004) observed that city brands have a multi-dimensional nature, encompassing a number of issues, such as economic growth, politics, history, architecture, environment, physical landscape, heritage or culture, and infrastructure. Kavaratzis (2004, p.67-69) explains that three types of city communication form the expressions of place:

- (1) Primary communication: a city's tangible elements, also known as place physics, architecture, and real place offerings.
- (2) Secondary communication/Place communication: advertising, public relations, and other propaganda tools that a city adopts in promoting itself.
- (3) Tertiary communication: the place of word-of-mouth communication, including the voices of the residents and the media.

In a later study, inspired by corporate-level marketing, Kavaratzis (2009) questions how city branding should be implemented. He confirms that “everything a city consists of everything that takes place in the city and is done by the city, communicates messages about the city's brand” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p.34). This view is shared by Zhang and Zhao (2009), who examined the effectiveness of efforts to brand China's capital city, Beijing. Zhang and Zhao (2009) describe how a city is not only the sum of its physical buildings and infrastructure, but also a complex organisation formed of various political, economic, and cultural groupings that go to create mental associations with the place. Zenker (2011), explored the concept and measurement of place image in general, and place branding in particular. Zenker (2011, p.40) suggests three approaches in the measurement of place brands:

- (1) exploring the brand associations of target groups through qualitative methods
- (2) exploring the attributes through quantitative methods
- (3) using mixed methods that combine both qualitative research with quantitative methods

One of Zenker's (2011) conclusions highlight the fact that to have a satisfactory and holistic understanding of a place, it is necessary to measure both the tangible elements/place physics (i.e., landscape, architecture), and the intangible elements (i.e., mental representation in the individual's mind). For a deeper discussion see also Braun (2012) as well as Zenker and Braun (2015). In line with this thought, a wide array of research on place (and cities in particular) branding has been developed. The study of De Carlo, Canali, Pritchard and Morgan (2009) try to understand the brand of Milan in terms of brand personality. Using questionnaires and qualitative interviews, they ask how the city tastes, smells and looks. Treuman, Cornelius and Kellingbeck-Widdup (2007) explored the positive and negative assets of a city. They asked the city's users open-ended and limited questions to attempt to uncover perceptions of the place. Zenker and Beckmann (2013) used qualitative in-depth interviews and network analysis to assess Hamburg's brand perception and the discrepancies in this between external and internal residents. Parkerson and Saunders (2004) deconstructed Birmingham's brand into its tangible and intangible brand elements. One of their significant findings is that “the role of local government is extensive in city branding” (Parkerson and Saunders, 2004, p.261). Kalandides (2011a) takes Prenzlauer Berg (a suburb of Berlin) as a case study and analyses the lack of a conceptualization of place identity from a place branding perspective. Kalandides (2011a) advanced the opinion that place image, institutions, relationships with power, class, gender, or people and their practices and traditions, all tell us something more about the brand identity of a place. Drawing evidence from the rebranding processes of three UK towns, Ntounis and Kavaratzis (2017), found out that the brand of a place is created by people's encounters with the place, and by their experiences, feelings, and opinions

about that place. Ruiz, De La Cruz, and Vázquez (2019), similarly, analyse the residents' perception towards the city of Malaga in Spain. By questioning 1230 residents, the authors found out that from the residents' point of view the Malaga brand must be improved inside and outside the city.

This is the moment to mention the study by Kavartzis and Kalandides (2015) which examined how people form place brands and their mental perceptions of place, in other words, "what – if anything – the place means for people, what – if anything – it adds to people's lives, how it makes people feel" (p.1376). The authors reveal that place branding is a highly selective political process, in the sense that creating a positive brand association will differ from person to person, and from one social group to another (Kavartzis and Kalandides, 2015).

Recent studies, additionally, start to apply a neuromarketing approach to destination branding. It is known that neuromarketing combines consumer psychology and neuropsychology. For example, in a study, titled *My destination in your brain: A novel neuromarketing approach for evaluating the effectiveness of destination marketing*, Bastiaansen et al. (2018) find out that "neuromarketing is a valuable tool for evaluating the effectiveness of destination marketing" (p.76). By testing the destination content in two movies over two groups of participants, the authors highlight that "popular movies can positively influence affective destination image" (Bastiaansen et al., 2018, p.76).

2.1 City branding practices in Turkey

In the last decade, the concept of city branding became an important field of study in Turkey as well. Demirdöğen (2018) looked at the city of Erzincan; Yalçın and Akıncı Vural (2020) study the city of İzmir; Yazar (2018) analysed the city of Gümüşhane; Eren and Bozkurt (2018) analysed the city of Nevşehir; Tektaş and Tektaş (2018) looked at the brand perception of the city of Bandırma; Sedefođlu and Kireçci (2018) investigated the city branding components of Dilovası; Bilgeođlu (2019) measure the brand image of the city of Konya. The study of Yücel and Öztürk (2018), for example, looked at Elazığ's city perception, and try to reveal the level of loyalty to the city as well as the positive and negative aspects of the city. By looking at how Elazığ is perceived by its people, its government, and its visitors the authors found out that after leaving Elazığ, especially visitors tend to recommend people around them to study in Elazığ. The fact that Elazığ is a calm and safe place, with hospitable and helpful people, with good education institutions has affected this result, say the authors. Another study conducted by Sadaklıođlu and Aşık (2019), try to uncover Tokat's image in people's minds. To achieve this goal, the authors conduct a questionnaire to 683 individuals who stay in three neighbouring cities to Tokat: Amasya, Sivas, and Samsun. Sadaklıođlu and Aşık (2019) find out that agricultural products, safety, hospitality, cuisine, climate, and historical and cultural texture are the most common characteristics of the city of Tokat. But in terms of city branding, the authors reveal that Tokat failed in city promotion, in providing job opportunities, and in arousing curiosity in the visitors. In a similar vein, Karataş (2016) looked at the visitors' perception of Malatya. By conducting a questionnaire to 410 Malatya visitors, Karataş (2016) try to measure the brand value of the city and find out that Malatya is mostly perceived as a safe and modern city but failed in being a city of arts and events. Dayanç Kıyat and Topal (2019) also attempt to analyse the city branding of Malatya. By gathering the opinions of people holding an important position in public and private institutions or organizations, the authors created a SWOT analysis of the city of Malatya. They find out that, compared to the surrounding provinces, the city is economically and culturally strong. Despite these strengths, tourism revenues are low. Even though many cultural activities, such as film festivals, fairs, promotion days are implemented in the area adequate advertising and communication channels are not used and the public is not engaged in any promotional work. By gathering secondary data, Uyar (2018) also looked at city branding practices in Turkey and conclude that "many provinces of Turkey claim to be a brand city but an important part of them do not carry out adequate studies for this purpose" (p.467). According to Saryyer and Altun (2019), one of the important factors in the branding of cities is the people living in the city and their perception towards the city they live in. By applying a survey to 504 citizens living in the center of Kayseri, Saryyer and Altun (2019) measure the city brand perception of Kayseri residents. The authors revealed that "the city of Kayseri is sincere, impressive, competent, social and enthusiastic" (Saryyer and Altun, 2019, p.22).

What these authors most forcefully show is that city brands are more complex than corporate brands. City branding includes many tangible and intangible elements that shape the brand image and perception of the city. Departing from this line of thinking and by focusing on two groups of residents living in Famagusta and Kyrenia (Northern Cyprus), we attempt to uncover their perceptions, associations, and feelings about the cities in which they live.

3. Methodology

This study adopted an interpretive analysis to obtain a comprehensive view of the perceptions of the cities of Famagusta and Kyrenia by two groups of residents: (1) people with a specific profession, such as a doctor, lawyer, business owner (henceforth referred to as Professionals) versus (2) Graduate Students. Non-residents, short-term visitors, special interest groups, and tourists were excluded from this study. A qualitative method (Supphellen, 2000) was used for interpretive analysis, as it provides a deeper understanding of abstract phenomena (Carson et al., 2001). A face-to-face interview method was implemented (Flick, 1998). A total of 40 interviews were conducted, and 10 members of each group were selected from a total of 20 respondents living in Famagusta, and 20 in Kyrenia. The interviews were administered by the authors in English and Turkish, as necessary.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, structured demographic questions were addressed to respondents to obtain basic information. The second part of the questionnaire was prepared in a semi-structured format, where respondents were able to provide their authentic views. This part was designed to elicit their perceptions and the tangible and intangible city brand elements arising from the two groups of residents. Five questions were asked for this purpose: the first two questions unravel the place physics (tangible elements), the most salient attributes, and specific features of the relevant city. The last three questions unravel the intangible elements and the respondents' emotional association with their city. These questions aimed to identify the positive and negative city-specific facets of the perceptions of the two groups of residents, as recommended by Kerr and Oliver (2015). The information we collected in the interviews, therefore reflected the residents' judgments and the residents' quality of life-based on their own experiences.

Taking Kavaratzis (2004) and Zenker's (2011) perspective as a reference in the evaluation of city branding below, we present the findings of the Famagusta and Kyrenia residents' tangible (e.g., place physics) and intangible (e.g., feelings, judgments, imagery) branding elements.

4. Findings

The samples taken from the two residential groups have similar demographic profiles: gender distribution of 19 out of 40 females, with the remainder being male. The average age of the professionals living in Kyrenia was 43.5 years (SD = 5.35), and for the graduate students, it was 32.9 (SD = 8.71). The average age of the professionals living in Famagusta was also 43.5 years (SD = 9.32), and that of the graduate students was 30.3 (SD = 5.12). In terms of residents' nationalities, 18 out of the 40 respondents were Turkish Cypriots, and the rest were foreigners, working and/or studying in Northern Cyprus. These people came from Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, Russia, Thailand, and the UK.

4.1 Reflections from the city of Famagusta: Tangibles and intangibles

To obtain the fundamental tangible and intangible elements, we focussed our questions on place physics and the emotional connections. What Famagusta's residents thought of various tangibles and intangibles is listed in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. A comparison of the clusters of the tangible and intangible elements amongst surveyed Famagusta residents

| FAMAGUSTA | | |
|--|------------------------|--|
| | Professionals | Graduate Students |
| Associated Attributes/ Characteristics | The sea | Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) |
| | The castle | The castle |
| | The commercial harbour | The sea |
| | Varosha the ghost town | The beaches |
| | The beaches | The old town |
| | EMU | Varosha the ghost town |
| | The old town | Salamis road and the bars on that road |
| | Narrow streets | Salamis Ruins |
| | Salamis Ruins | |

| | | |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Unique Features | The castle | The castle |
| | Rich in history | EMU |
| | The commercial harbour | The old town |
| | The old town | The beaches |
| | Varosha the ghost town | The sea |
| | Othello's Tower | Varosha the ghost town |
| | People of Famagusta | Rich in history/Many historical places |
| | EMU | |
| | The beaches | |
| Feelings | Serenity/Calmness | Safe/Secure |
| | Lazy | Boring (monotonous) |
| | Boring | Serenity/Calmness |
| | Simple | Educated |
| | Old | Dirty |
| | Noisy | Friendly |
| | Sincere | Romantic |
| | Safe | Lazy |
| | Friendly | Home |
| | Deserted | Simple |
| | Dirty | Noisy |
| | Comfortable | |
| | Mysterious | |
| | Untouched | |
| Likes | Richly historical places | Lively social life |
| | Beautiful beaches/The sea | The beaches and sea |
| | Natural beauty | Serenity/Quietness |
| | Young | Like home |
| | Energetic | Cosmopolitan |
| | Home | |
| | Freedom | |
| Dislikes | People of Famagusta | People of Famagusta |
| | Limited access to the sea | Poor city planning |
| | Lifestyle and manners of people | Traffic |
| | Poor roads | Limited social life |
| | Poor city planning | Expensive |
| | Dirty | |
| | Negative impacts of the high student population | |
| | Lack of public transportation, green spaces, and cycle paths | |
| | Limited social life | |

As demonstrated in Table 1, the initial findings suggest that the professionals and graduate students living in Famagusta show many similarities in their responses to the tangible elements of the city. *The sea, the castle, and the historic places* are their top core associations. The two groups also display some significant divergences: while the graduate students' responses prioritised *Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)*, the lively *Salamis Road*, and *the bars* located on that road, only a few professionals indicated *EMU*, and none of them indicated the *Salamis Road* and the *bars* as their top core associations. Instead, the *commercial harbour* was one of their top core associations. A factor that was disregarded by the graduate students. Furthermore, *the castle* in Famagusta was the most popular unique tangible element for both groups of residents. Conversely, *rich history* and the *Othello's*

Tower were unique features only indicated by the professionals but overlooked by graduate students. *EMU* was again prioritised by the graduate students but only mentioned by few professionals.

To get the details of the intangible elements as perceived by the residents, we questioned the city brand perception, emotional aspects, values, likes, and dislikes (Kavaratzis, 2004; Parkerson and Saunders, 2004). There were many similarities in the negative intangibles reported by the two groups, such as Famagusta being a *boring, dirty, and noisy* place with *poor city planning* and *limited social life*. However, the positive intangible elements were listed, primarily by the professionals, as Famagusta being *home, safe, comfortable, young, and an energetic* city. As was the intention of the question, all the answers regarding the top-rated emotions evoked by Famagusta were intangible. While the graduate students prioritised *safety* and *security* as their main feelings, the professionals prioritised *serenity* and *calmness*, as their main feelings towards the city. This finding seems to be as expected, since Famagusta does not have identifiably high crime rates, and it is certainly on the list of the world’s most dangerous cities.

Both groups of residents prioritised feeling of *laziness* in Famagusta. This is a reference to the perception of the poor services provided, especially by the municipality, but also by the government. Yet, there were differing opinions on the feelings individually expressed, as shown in Table 1. The professionals mentioned the positive and negative emotions evoked by Famagusta: as a place being *deserted, and irritating* on the negative side, and being *comfortable, mysterious, and untouched* on the positive. The graduate students associated the city with feelings of *simplicity* and *monotony* on the negative side, and feelings of being *friendly* on the positive.

Main likes indicated by the professionals regarding Famagusta concerned its *rich history, beautiful beaches, and the sea*. The graduate students’ favourite associations concerning Famagusta included a *lively social life* and a *homely* feeling. The main convergence in opinion for the two groups was the *beautiful beaches*.

We also looked at what the groups most disliked about Famagusta. The results suggest that the top-rated dislike by both groups of residents was the city’s conservative lifestyle and the poor manners displayed by the *Famagustan people*. Famagustans are viewed as *gossips (they are like peasants* a few respondents offered), and locals came in for strong criticism from both the groups we interviewed. This seems to allude to the islander’s mentality and the narrow-mindedness of people living in Famagusta. They are accused to have a low mentality, even by some Turkish Cypriots themselves.

Famagusta has a population of 40,920, and approximately half of this is made up of university students. Some residents refer to their home as a *university city*, but the increasing number of students is not welcomed by the professionals. Rather, it is seen as having a negative impact on the city. Another subject indicated as a negative appears to be the *limited access to the seaside*. Due to the political situation, the Turkish military is located along the entire coastline in and around Famagusta. As a result, there is no access to the sea from the city, and no social activity of any is permitted by the sea (e.g., no marinas, no walking areas, and none of the bars or restaurants are located at the seaside). This limited access to the sea was the major element of frustration expressed by the professionals. Interestingly, this was not a cause for complaint for the graduate students. The Graduate students consider *poor city planning, lack of social life, and expense* to be the most disliked elements.

4.2 Reflections from the city of Kyrenia: Tangibles and intangibles

To identify the place physics and emotional elements for the city of Kyrenia, we questioned what Kyrenia residents thought of the different tangibles and intangibles underlying the survey (see Table 2). Kyrenia is hosts five universities and has a resident population of about 20,851. Despite Northern Cyprus’ politically contested brand image, in the last decade, it has attracted an increasing number of foreign university students, especially from the developing world (the Middle East, Africa, some post-Soviet states, such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Georgia and Kazakhstan). Like Famagusta, Kyrenia is a maritime place, it’s not home to man-made wonders like the Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower), and its historic and cultural resources are perhaps not as appealing as those of major tourist destinations like London, Amsterdam, or Berlin.

TABLE 2: Comparison of the clusters of the Tangible and Intangible elements amongst surveyed Kyrenian residents

| KYRENIA | | |
|---------|--|---------------------|
| | Professionals | Graduate Students |
| | Serenity | Serenity |
| | The sea | Beautiful landscape |
| | Beautiful (The most beautiful city in Cyprus, paradise, pretty, picturesque) | Safe |
| | | Home |
| | Historical places (St. Hillarion, Bellapais Abbey) | Historical places |
| | | Lovely people |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Associated Attributes / Characteristics | Old Harbour | Traffic jams |
| | Kyrenia Castle | Lively |
| | Fresh air | Easy to access |
| | Universities | Nice restaurants |
| | Restaurant | |
| | Construction | |
| | Home | |
| | Entertainment | |
| | | |
| Unique Features | Old Harbour | Peaceful/Serenity |
| | The sea | Touristic |
| | The mountains (Five Fingers Mountains) | Old Harbour |
| | Kyrenia Castle | St. Hilarion Castle |
| | St Hilarion | The sea |
| | Modern | Compaq |
| | Touristic | People know each other |
| | 5-star Hotels and Casinos | Variety of activities (paragliding, scuba diving) |
| | Attracts higher-income people | |
| | Beaches in the Alagadi area | |
| | | |
| Feelings | Peaceful / Serenity | Peaceful / Serenity |
| | Happiness | Happiness |
| | Emotional attachment | Home |
| | Poor management | Secure |
| | Dirty | Friendly |
| | Trust | Childhood memories |
| | Friendly | Sincere |
| | Entertaining | Love |
| | Noisy | |
| | Melancholy | |
| | Respectful people | |
| | Compact | |
| Likes | The sea | Restaurants and bars |
| | The serenity | Social circle |
| | The mountains | Historical |
| | Easy accessibility to other cities | Diversity in population |
| | Lifestyle (genuine Cyprus culture) | Weather |
| | Emotionally attached | Variety of entertainment |
| | Good traffic | Nature |
| | Safe | Beautiful sightseeing sites |
| | Historical | Shopping |
| Old harbour | Kyrenia center | |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Dislikes | Poor city planning (lack of zoning, parking problems) | Dirty |
| | High towers | Poor city planning (lack of zoning) |
| | Lack of proper infrastructure | Poor roads |
| | Poor city management | High towers |
| | Traffic | Traffic |
| | Dirty | Crowded |
| | Noisy | Expensive |
| | Lack of greenery | Lack of public transport |
| | Limited seaside walks | Poor city management |
| | Erosion of Cypriot culture | Disrespectful people |
| | | |

Table 2 illustrates that the top core associations of the professionals and graduate students living in the city of Kyrenia shared some similarities and significant disparities. Both groups of residents prioritised the attribute of *serenity*. While most of the professionals associated Kyrenia with *the sea*, this attribute was overlooked by the graduate students. Both groups pointed out the beauty and ‘historical places’ in the city. The tangible attributes like the *Old Harbour* and *Kyrenia Castle* were indicated by the professionals, while they were disregarded by the graduate students. On the other hand, intangible elements like being a *safe place* and *lovely people* attributes were highlighted by only the graduate students. Other core associations expressed by the professionals were mainly Tangible attributes like *universities*, and *restaurants and bars*.

Our initial findings for Kyrenia suggest that the professionals associated Kyrenia with *the sea*, whereas the graduate students associated the city with the *beautiful landscape*. Even though Kyrenia’s *Old Harbour* was indicated as the top unique attraction in the city, only the professionals mentioned it as the top core association. There were two dominant feelings the professionals had for Kyrenia: *serenity* and *happiness*. It is important to note that the professionals whose origins lay in Turkey referred to the ease of traffic as a contributory factor in the city’s serenity, whereas for many Turkish Cypriot residents, *traffic* was a cause for disliking the city. On the other hand, the graduate students associated *serenity*, *happiness*, and a feeling of *home* equally in their comments. Despite the similarity of feeling shared by both groups, there was no parity in the things that they liked. In several interviews conducted with professionals living in Famagusta, we heard praise for the lifestyles of Kyrenian people and the varied cuisines on offer to them.

Finally, when asked to indicate their main dislikes concerning Kyrenia, many of the graduate students who participated in the interviews mentioned the *poor roads* and *dirty environment*. In other words, the standard of living. Similarly, *poor city planning*, newly constructed *high-rise buildings*, *lack of proper infrastructure*, and *poor city management* appeared to be the main negative factors voiced by the professionals. Whilst both groups of residents praised Kyrenia as the most *beautiful* city in Cyprus, many of the graduate student interviewees expressed the desire to see Kyrenia become a less expensive city.

It appears that the lack of urban planning; the lack of effective governance and city management; uncontrolled environmental pollution; massive construction, and the demolition of green spaces for the sake of construction were widely cited by the professional group in Kyrenia.

5. Conclusions

City branding “expresses the internal, cultural understandings of those who are ‘we’ as a community or an organisation” (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013, p.11). This study does not provide a city branding strategy for any local authorities, municipalities, tourist offices, or local chambers of Commerce. However, it does provide them with information about how two cities that are in a politically contested and economically isolated geography are seen, perceived, and imagined by their residents. We focussed our analysis on the residents, as they are accepted as the “most important target audience of city branding” (Kavaratzis, 2004, p.69). This is also highlighted in the study of Zenker, Eggers, and Farsky (2013). Undoubtedly, developing an effective city brand while ignoring the meaning of the city to its residents cannot produce a success story.

In surveying the residents of Famagusta and Kyrenia we used qualitative methods (Supphellen, 2000), and we applied an in-depth interviewing technique to two groups of residents in each of the cities: namely professionals and graduate students. We followed the extant city branding literature to maintain focus, especially that of Kavaratzis (2004) and Zenker’s (2011) theoretical frameworks for developing city branding. We uncovered tangible and intangible elements as perceived by residents in the two cities.

Previous research showed that Malatya is perceived as a modern and safe city to live in (Karataş, 2016). When the brand potential of Famagusta and Kyrenia is evaluated for residents, we also find out that both cities are perceived

as safe and secure. Our results are in line with the study of Sariyer and Altun (2019) as well as with Tektař and Tektař (2018), as we equally reveal that different resident groups have different positive and negative associations with their city. Although the professionals and graduate students come from different backgrounds and do not necessarily share the same points of view, those are as associated with poor city planning seemed to constitute the most negative parts of responses to the cities of Famagusta and Kyrenia. The graduate students of foreign descent especially viewed Famagusta as a good place to study, but not a good place to live. The initiatives taken by Famagusta's city authorities are regarded as inadequate by this group. Similarly, Kyrenia is seen as a lovely place with lovely people and a beautiful landscape, but it is also seen as having poor city planning, poor roads, and a poor public transport system, thus receiving high levels of criticism from the graduate students.

Our research revealed that Famagusta and Kyrenia's residents have similar perceptions of their cities when both groups of residents complain about their standards of living. When the two groups of residents in the two cities expressed their ideas about the Tangible elements, real place offerings as well as city planning, these tended to be negative. Their responses were also unfavourable regarding the standards of living. Contrary to our expectations, when residents expressed their ideas about the Intangible elements, they were more inclined to be positive. Their responses were favourable about the emotional connections they had made with their cities.

The present study has three major limitations. First, the qualitative in-depth interviewing method necessarily contains a certain degree of subjectivity, due to the interpretations made by the researchers (Chan and Marafa, 2013). Second, a true reflection of the perceptions of those residents in the two cities is limited and cannot satisfactorily be expected to be definitive solely from interviews with twenty individuals in each city. And third, the study focused merely on the residents and did not look at administrative or municipal city branding practices. Given that we are living in an increasingly digitalised world, where the use of the Internet became a must in the daily lives of people, future city branding research could focus more on the impacts of social media tools on the perceptions of cities. The studies of Yazar (2019) and, Yałcın and Akıncı Vural (2020) are good example, in this respect.

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