

“The Role of Cittaslow in Destination Branding: the Case of Seferihisar“

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Abstract

Today, it can be said that tourism is seen as an instrument of local development. Branding destinations and product differentiation are necessary to achieve competitive advantage due to experiencing intense competition in the tourism industry. Cittaslow is one of the tools in destination branding in recent years that is noteworthy. Tourism differentiates in Cittaslow, which reached number nine in Turkey. The basic philosophy of Cittaslow is to forefront local values of destinations and different elements from other destinations. Therefore, preserved local and ecological in Cittaslow labeled destinations are important. In this study, the changes in Seferihisar which is Turkey's first Cittaslow labeled destination, is examined. In this context, an evaluation of Seferihisar has been done, considering the effect of being Cittaslow.

Keywords: *cittaslow; destination branding; Seferihisar; tourism*

Paper Type: *Scientific study*

Introduction

Nowadays, everything is getting quicker and everybody is looking for a faster way of transportation, communication and etc. The pace of modern life has put human life in a never-ending circle and standardization, by the way crushing local values of population (Baldemir et al., 2013).

Changing modern society and globalization bring both opportunity and threat to national cultures, heritage and identity of small towns. They are facing loss of their traditional heritage, because globalization and fashion do not focus on local traditions, history and values. Therefore, these places become less attractive to live, work, visit or invest in. Hence, international tourism creates less economic benefit and may have more negative effect (Valcic and Domsic, 2012).

The Cittaslow movement stands against assimilation of small cities by globalization and popular culture. Cittaslow approach arose from deceleration of pace of change and conservation of local attributes without losing their own identities by the effect of global capital and urbanization tendency. It bases on preservation of ecological and sustainable attributes that exist in traditional structures of cities (Baldemir et al., 2013). In terms of destination branding, Cittaslow is a tool which can be used to differentiate cities from others. For this scope, this study discusses Cittaslow and Seferihisar in terms of destination branding.

Cittaslow (Slow City) Philosophy

“Cittaslow which means ‘slow city’ is an international network of small towns that originated in Italy with the aim of addressing the ‘Slow Food’ philosophy in their urban design and planning” (Mielle, 2008: 136). The Cittaslow movement was born in 1999 through the Paolo Saturnini’s clever idea, former Mayor of Greve in Chianti. The idea is to consider a new way of small town development based on improving quality of life and spread all over Italy. Rapidly this idea was endorsed by Mayors of towns of Bra (Francesco Guida), Orvieto (Stefano Cimicchi) and Positano (Domenico Marrone), were also supported by the president of slow food Carlo Petrini. The main goal of the Cittaslow is to apply the concepts of ecogastronomy in practice of everyday life (Cittaslow.org, 2014).

Cittaslow secures slow and healthy succession of seasons, respectful of citizens’ health, the authenticity of products and good food, rich of fascinating craft traditions of valuable works of art, squares, theaters, shops, cafes, restaurants, places of the spirit and unspoiled landscapes, characterized by spontaneity of religious rites, respect of traditions through the joy of a slow and quiet living (Cittaslow.org, 2014).

Slow City philosophy includes good living with the opportunity to enjoy solutions and services that allow citizens to live in their town in an easy and pleasant way. Living slow means looking for the best of the knowledge of the past and enjoying it

thanks to the best possibilities of the present and of the future. At present living and managing a Slow City is just a particular way of carrying on an ordinary life-style rather than today's trends. Slow City means more human, environmentally correct and sensible for the present and future generations; the project respects small realities in a more and more global connected world (cittaslowseferihisar.org, 2014).

Certification of Slow City is given by a committee to towns, which have to apply. The committee comprises from representatives from other Slow Cities and visits the applicant towns to have idea how the applicant fits in the Cittaslow philosophy. The Slow City criteria are related to three E's (Environment, Economy and Social Equity) of sustainability. Air quality control, waste management, alternative energy sources and light pollution control are criteria to conserve town's environmental assets. Production and consumption of local products are other criteria in terms of local economic growth (Mayer and Knox, 2006). There are 70 criteria under 7 topics (Cittaslowturkiye.org, 2014):

- 1) environmental policies,
- 2) infrastructure policies,
- 3) technologies and facilities for Urban Quality,
- 4) safeguarding autochthonous production,
- 5) hospitality,
- 6) awareness,
- 7) support to Slow Food activities and projects.

Applicant towns can be accredited as Cittaslow member after town council assess its town and score at least 50 percent against specified criteria. Cittaslow towns have to have population of less than 50,000 residents (Pink, 2008). After being Cittaslow member, towns must continue to develop areas support Cittaslow Philosophy.

By April 2014 there were 187 Slow Cities in 28 Countries all over the World. Nine of these Slow Cities are located in Turkey. Seferihisar, which is the first Slow City in Turkey, joined the Cittaslow movement in 2009. Cittaslow membership of Seferihisar brought it national fame. After Seferihisar became Cittaslow, 60 more cities requested information from Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry. Foregoing, Gökçeada (Çanakkale), Taraklı (Sakarya), Akyaka (Muğla), Yenipazar (Aydın), Perşembe (Ordu), Yalvaç (Isparta), Vize (Kırklareli) and Halfeti (Şanlıurfa) have been accepted to Cittaslow Community (cittaslowturkiye.org, 2014).

Concept of Branding

Brand is "a name, term, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods, or services of one seller, or a group of sellers, and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler, 2002). Without the brand name, a firm could not differentiate its products. To consumers, a brand name is as fundamental as the product itself (Pride and Ferrel, 2006). Selling well-known named products is a smarter business than selling a bulk of products or generic goods (Anholt, 2002).

Branding is a disciplined process used to build awareness and customer loyalty. It requires a mandate from the top and

the willingness to invest in the future. Branding takes every opportunity to express why people should choose a given brand (Wheeler, 2010). Brand concept classically makes the initial phase of the brand for its reality. Brand begins with a product, it is not the product: the brand is the feeling, meaning of the product (Kapferer, 1995).

To create a successful brand it is necessary to build emotional relation between the product and the consumer. Every consumer has their own brand wardrobes. Consumers express their emotions, personality and roles by selecting brands while communicating and support associations, statements and memberships (Morgan et al, 2001).

Main purpose of branding is to have consumer loyalty by setting brand equity. According to brand expert Aaker (1991) brand equity is "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers". Typically, there are five stages to create positive brand equity. These stages are briefly stated below (aytm.com, 2014):

- 1) *Brand awareness: Consumers are aware of the brand.*
- 2) *Brand recognition: Consumers recognize the brand and know what it offers versus competitors.*
- 3) *Brand trial: Consumers have tried the brand.*
- 4) *Brand preference: Consumers like the brand and become repeat purchasers. They begin to develop emotional connections to the brand.*
- 5) *Brand loyalty: Consumers demand the brand and will travel distances to find it. As loyalty increases so do emotional connections until there is no adequate substitute for the brand in the consumer's mind.*

Brand loyalty is an incontestable value for business. Brands take promises of loyal consumer to repurchase at regular intervals. Also brand owner can forecast cash flows and eventually manage and develop business plans confidently (Blackett, 2003). Additionally, brand loyalty is important because of gaining sustainable competitive advantage. A brand is as important as an asset of the company like a building or machinery. Increase in brand value causes a rise in total asset value of the organization (Pride and Ferrell, 2006)

Destination Branding

According to The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), destination is "is a physical space in which a visitor spends at least one overnight. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within one day's return travel time" (unwto.org, 2014). In fact, all destinations are products: the consumption of the complex of activities that comprises the tourism experience is what is being sold to customers. Ultimately, the tourist product, i.e. what is being sold to consumers as a vacation experience, which typically consists of activities performed by several independent services firms (virbusgame.eu, 2014).

Branding is the most important marketing tool to destination marketing while increasing product parity and competition at tourism market (Morgan et al., 2001). Although destinations

are products, branding destinations is more complex than other goods and services, for these reasons (Pike, 2005):

- * Destinations are far more multidimensional than consumer goods and other types of services.
- * The market interests of the diverse group of active stakeholders in destinations are heterogeneous.
- * The politics of decision making can render the best of theory irrelevant.
- * There is a fine balance to be struck between community consensus and brand theory because a top down approach to destination brand implementation is likely to fail.
- * Brand loyalty, one of the cornerstones of consumer-based brand equity models, can be operationalised to some extent by measuring repeat visitation through a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO)'s visitor monitor programme.
- * Funding is often a continuous problem for DMOs, in both scale and consistency. Even the largest DMO budgets pale in comparison to those of the major corporate brands, with which they compete for discretionary consumer spend.

Today's destinations have wonderful five-star hotels and resorts, and claiming to have unique culture and heritage, friendliest people etc. are no longer differentiators (Morgan et al., 2001). Destination brands are now differentiators. Destination branding can be described as "a process used to develop a unique identity that is different from all competitive destinations" (Uhrenholt, 2008). The purpose of destination branding is to combine all things associated with the place like agriculture, sports activities, arts, technology, celebrities, attractions, etc. into brand identity (Uhrenholt, 2008).

According to Blain et al., (2005) destination branding is: a set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word, mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk.

According to Ward and Gold (1994) destination branding can be international, national, regional and local in scope (Henderson, 2007). For all levels of destination branding, how potential tourists decide to visit or revisit one place is whether they are emotionally close to destination or not. Tomorrow's destination marketplace competition will be over consumer hearts and minds not over prices (Morgan et al., 2001).

The main purposes of destination branding are as follows (Uhrenholt, 2008):

- * Branding seeks to convey messages to the user or potential user of the destination.
- * A way to communicate a destination's unique identity to visitors.
- * The core benefit lies in creating customer loyalty through recruitment of new and retention of existing customers.
- * A means of differentiating a destination from its competitors.
- * A uniform voice that all destination partners can consistently use.

- * A symbol, name, term or design, or combination of these elements which people recognise or recall.
- * Lastly, it has become the means of competition in the global market-place, and therefore it is necessary in order to compete.
- * A well-received destination brand identity can help shape a country's economic, cultural and political destiny.
- * The destination marketing attempts to create jobs and economic growth with an overall benefit to the country's economy.

As seen at Figure 1, destination branding includes three main elements: identity, image and positioning. According to Pike (2008) "brand positioning elements such as the name, symbol and slogan, are used by the marketer to cut through the noise of competing and substitute products to stimulate an induced destination image that matches the brand identity".

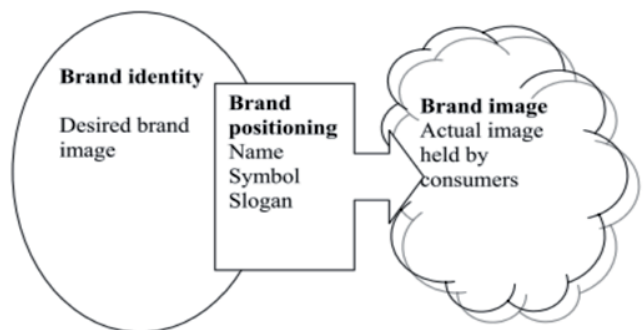


Fig. 1. Destination Identity, Brand Positioning and Brand Image

Source: Pike, 2008 (p. 5)

According to Tapachai and Waryzak (2000), destination image has an important role about destination selection of tourists. For this reason, destinations need to differentiate themselves in order to be noticed by the targeted visitors, investors, and corporations. Moreover, destinations need to develop a believable and desired image, which is possible by matching the identity with wished lifestyle of potential tourists (Uhrenholt, 2008). Chon and Olsen (1991) claim that the greater the match between self-concept and the product-user image, the greater the likelihood that consumers will consume that product. Research in tourism has identified a significant relationship between tourists' satisfaction/dissatisfaction and tourists' self-image/destination-image congruity.

Brand identity is the state of will of the organization and the active part of the image building process. The brand identity is how the brand is wanted to be perceived. The brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the management wants to create or maintain. The associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization (Rainisto, 2007).

According to Gunn's (1988) model of the seven phases of the travel experience, the destination image is modified in the first, second and seventh phases (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003):

1. Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences*
2. Modification of those images by further information*
3. Decision to take a vacation trip

4. Travel to the destination
5. Participation at the destination
6. Return home
7. Modification of images based on the vacation experience*

At the first stage, the image is based primarily upon information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources, such as the general media (news reports, magazines, books and movies), education (school courses) and the opinions of family/friends. This image is called *organic* image.

At the second stage more commercial sources of information, such as travel brochures, travel agents and travel guidebooks, are used. Consequently, new information is gathered that changes organic image. This image is called *induced* image.

In the final phase, destination image is used to be modified by actual experiences (Miele, 2008). This image can be called *complex* image.

Cittaslow and Destination Branding in Seferihisar Interpretation

Seferihisar is located within the borders of İzmir in the Aegean region. The oldest settlement on Seferihisar district grounds is Teos, thought to be a Carian city, established by Cretans that escaped from the Akas in 2000 B.C. Among Seferihisar's strong points are its famous mandarins, its sun, rich geothermal and wind energy resources, and historical riches. The reason behind the fact that the unplanned development on the Aegean and Mediterranean shores has not affected it is that archaeological sites and military zones surround Seferihisar (cittaslowseferihisar.org, 2014).

According to Mielle (2008), Italian Cittaslow member cities actively promote destination branding policies to stress their identity and to attract tourists. Like Italian cities, Seferihisar has been promoting branding policies since certified as Slow City in 2009. Cittaslow logo (see figure 2) is in use through almost everywhere in city. Lots of news and articles about Seferihisar take part at the local and national press like Sabah, Zaman, Milliyet, Radikal, Yeni Şafak etc. This means that the organic image (non-commercial promotion) of the city could be set in the mind of local tourist.



Fig. 2. Cittaslow Logo

Source: www.cittaslowturkiye.org

On the other hand, certification of Cittaslow is a kind of eco-certification of destinations like blue flag, green globe, EU Ecolabel etc. and useful for both consumers (tourist) and businesses (destinations). Cittaslow environmental policies criteria requires protection and controlling air, water and soil quality, pollution control and adoption of systems of environmental management (Ecolabel and ISO systems). Eventually, these requirements inform tourist about environmentally friendly destinations before purchase. In addition to these, Cittaslow's safeguarding autochthonous production and hospitality criteria topics protect unique local cultural values and provide hospitality to tourists. These requirements ensure tourists the opportunity to compare what they want to purchase with what they get.

Cittaslow movement takes more and more people's attention nowadays. This movement is an ecologically branded organization. Therefore, member towns ensure to be branding destinations by joining this movement. Seferihisar, which is the first Cittaslow destination in Turkey, is a branded destination.

Branding a destination affects stakeholders such as local people, businesses and tourists. According to table 1, the population of Seferihisar has increased from 28,603 to 33,588 after being Cittaslow (17.5%) (tuik.gov.tr, 2014).

Tab.1. Seferihisar's population

Year	Population
2009	28,603
2010	32,655
2011	30,890
2012	31,467
2013	33,588

Source: www.tuik.gov.tr

Bed capacity of the city was 1,500 until 2009, it increased to 3,000 in 2012 and 4,500 in 2014. One 5 star hotel and two 4 star holiday village were opened in the last two years (seferihisar.bel.tr). In 2011, occupancy rate of the hotels in Seferihisar was 79%, while overall occupancy in İzmir city was 49%. At the same period, average length of stay was 5.5 days and number of tourist was 31,528 (izmiriplanliyorum.org, 2014). Daily visitors are much more than tourists, especially weekends.

Destination image in visitors' perception is probably most significant criteria while selecting destination that should be taken into consideration. Therefore, Cittaslow as an international reliable brand is extremely important for Seferihisar to gain marketing and branding advantage in the fore. Cittaslow International Network which was founded in Italy in 1999 protects city texture and inhabitants' lifestyles against globalization. Slow cities fulfill Sustainable Development Indicators of United Nations, OECD and European Union even more. So that, that can be said the Cittaslow tag is a successful implementation of sustainable local development (Yalçın ve Yalçın, 2013:40). It can be said that after being Cittaslow member, Seferihisar increased the efforts to protect local life style. In this context, some of the local values are to the fore and are branded. Seferihisar Manufacturer Market and Sefertasi Res-

restaurant are best practices. Sefertası Restaurant serves only local dishes. This restaurant opens the way of branding local foods like Seferihisar Ravioli, Samsades, Rolling Pin Baklava, Bread Stuffed and Lok Lok Pilaf (seferihisar.bel.tr, 2014).

Cittaslow Seferihisar is an ideal holiday destination for people who care about local and ecological values and live in big cities. Seferihisar is very near to İzmir which is Turkey's 3. major metropolitan city. It can be said that people want to escape from İzmir's tiring city life, see Seferihisar as a breath-taking place on weekends. Local government of Seferihisar evaluates Cittaslow as a road map to reach local development and to be a sustainable city. In this context, the municipality of Seferihisar has made Local Manufacturer Market come true. Here the local people sell products directly to consumers in a market environment. While promoting and cultivating the natural products, the manufacturers win more, on the one hand, the consumers is consuming local, fresh and healthy products. Visitors from İzmir come especially to purchase local products. Beyond from local market, visitors are important to the local economy.

Like Manufacturer Market, other local values that create positive image, are effective to preferences of visitors. The economy of Seferihisar is based on agriculture, fishing and olive products after joining the Cittaslow network tourism provides income. Visitors come to see Sığacık Castle, Teos Antic City, Marina, thermal water springs and beaches. Tourists come to see also alternative attractions. In this context, the practices done in Seferihisar are bellows (cittaslowseferihisar.org, 2014):

- * Blue Flag: Seferihisar Municipality get three blue flag to Sığacık Akkum, Akarca and Ürkmez Beaches after application to Turkish Environment Foundation.
- * Landscaping work: A sustainable street arrangement was made at the city's main street (Atatürk Street) where pedestrians can socialize, take a breath against life's fast pace. In this context, all the buildings along the street facades were painted, the sidewalks expanded, signs are renewed and flowers were placed on the balconies.
- * Traffic Arrangement: Some streets closed to vehicle traffic in order to reduce traffic on main Street and rearranged to pedestrian traffic. Two bicycle garage were constructed at the downtown and Sığacık Coast in order to promote bicycle usage in the city. Seferihisar Municipality gives hiring bicycle service for free of charge.
- * Renewable Energy Usage: The Solar Energy Bicycle Project, the Alternative Energy Tram Project, the Biogas Fa-

cility Project, the Seferihisar-Doğanbey Day Trip Cure Centre and Accommodation Units Project, Energy Efficiency Trainings and other projects are still underway and developing.

- * Plastic chairs will no longer be used at the coffeehouses, instead color coordinated chairs, and tables will be placed. The eating areas of the fish restaurants, south of Sığacık Castle have been moved to the brook side and the plastic blinds have been removed. The old roofs of the fish restaurants have been replaced with integrated aesthetic roof.
- * Sığacık Producer Market has been established at Kaleiçi in the Sığacık neighbourhood of Seferihisar in order to display local products and handicrafts. Seferihisar Municipality Women's Labour Houses have been opened in Ulaş Neighbourhood and Doğanbey Village of Seferihisar in order for women to receive training and produce goods. The aim is to open a Women's Labour House in every neighbourhood of Seferihisar.
- * Developing city and school gardens with local crops grown with conventional methods: Vegetable gardens have been allocated in school in order to educate children, going to schools in Seferihisar, on healthy eating and growing their own vegetable and fruit. Students sell the products grown in the vegetable gardens at the Village Market under the supervision of their teachers.

Conclusion

Cittaslow is an important ecological movement, which provides destinations to gain a better destination image. Organic destination image is a powerful tool to persuade tourist to visit destinations. Seferihisar has been a branding destination after joining Cittaslow movement. Also being the first member city, Seferihisar is a very popular destination in Turkey. After being a member of Cittaslow movement; the population, number of tourists, number of accommodation units and popularity of Seferihisar increased dramatically.

As a good example of Cittaslow cities in Turkey and all around the world, researchers advise all small towns to apply joining this movement. An increase in the number of slow cities in Turkey is predicted. Therefore, the popularity and number of tourist visiting the slow cities would be increased in future. Tourism income and eventually income of the local people will rise in member cities.

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