

Book Review |

Evinç Doğan (2016). **Image of Istanbul, Impact of ECoC 2010 on The City Image**. London: Transnational Press London. [222 pp, RRP: £18.75, ISBN: 978-1-910781-22-7]

The idea of discovering or creating a form of uniqueness to differentiate a place from others is clearly attractive. In this regard, and in line with Ashworth (2009), three urban planning instruments are widely used throughout the world as a means of boosting a city's image: (i) personality association - where places associate themselves with a named individual from history, literature, the arts, politics, entertainment, sport or even mythology; (ii) the visual qualities of buildings and urban design, which include flagship building, signature urban design and even signature districts and (iii) event hallmarking - where places organize events, usually cultural (e.g., European Capital of Culture, henceforth referred to as ECoC) or sporting (e.g., the Olympic Games), in order to obtain worldwide recognition. From these instruments, Evinç Doğan has decided to focus on the possible ways in which a city and its image are influenced, and eventually transformed, throughout the process of a mega-event – this specific event being Istanbul as ECoC 2010. It is important to underline here that, following the 1999 Decision of the European Commission enabling non-European Union Member States to hold the ECoC title, three cities were designated as ECoC 2010: (i) Essen for the Ruhr (Germany), (ii) Pécs (Hungary) and (iii) Istanbul (Turkey).

Doğan convincingly argues that mega-events, such as the ECoC, may be used as forms of advertising for city marketing and branding. Using the same line of reasoning, Hall (1989) underlines that places organize and sponsor temporary events not only to obtain wider recognition of their existence, but also to establish specific brand associations. Richards and Wilson (2004, p. 1931) attest that “cities have long used mega events such as World Fairs, Expos and sporting events as a means of revitalizing their economies, creating



infrastructure and improving their image”. Furthermore, Ashworth (2009) states that is “is not an exaggeration to claim that there are well documented cases of such events triggering a drastic reinvention of the place and it does seem that such events are most significant at the level of strategic reorientation” (Ashworth, 2009, p. 19). The widely debated examples of the Barcelona Summer Olympics in 1992 or, more recently, the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008, triggered, or at least signalled, a change in direction. Bearing in mind the current literature on the topic (e.g., Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015) I wondered whether or not this book provides critical insights into the discussion. It does indeed provide them, as I will further elaborate.

The book is divided into five chapters. The literature selected by the author is appropriate and covers important ground on various disciplines. Doğan does not allow the reader to be confused regarding conceptual definitions. She provides a good number of explanations of the key concepts employed throughout the book. For example, place branding, city marketing, city image building and semiology are well covered in this book. From my point of view, the book excels in its exploration of the theoretical linkage between these disciplines by building empirical evidence based on Istanbul as ECoC 2010. The author starts the book in a straightforward manner by underlining that “The mega-events are useful to spread the word about the city” (p. 1). However, I would have opted to start with a slightly critical question: “Are mega-events of any relevance in giving visibility to or improving the notoriety of places”? In spite of this and to a considerable extent, Doğan develops a line of reasoning that makes this book a novel one.

Doğan focuses on the communication process that aims to influence perceptions of Istanbul’s image, instead of focusing on the results of Istanbul as ECoC 2010. The author does this by outlining the theoretical approach for dissecting the city’s image (Chapter 1). She then highlights the role of spectacles as mechanisms for marketing and branding tools to communicate the city’s image (Chapter 2). In Chapter 2, Doğan also argues that the image of Istanbul is changing following the globalization of the economic sector. The city has new shopping malls, multinational firms with their headquarters in high-rise buildings, five star hotels and gated communities that are replacing old, historical neighbourhoods. This book highlights that Istanbul has more to lose if it fails to preserve its historical built environment than it does with the pursuit of urban modernization. In Chapter 3, the communication strategy of the mega-event – ECoC Istanbul 2010 – is explored in light of the image-making process. The author does this by interpreting the visual meanings and messages contained in a number of posters used to market and communicate the event (Chapter 4). This is achieved by employing mixed qualitative methods for analysing visual data. The author uses semiotics, discourse analysis and thematic analysis. The Istanbul 2010 Agency only officially published four posters. However, the author has worked on 28 of 549 posters (approximately 5%).

The ways in which Istanbul as ECoC 2010 impacted on Istanbul's city image are importantly analysed in Chapter 5. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of these posters. The author demonstrates great knowledge of Istanbul's urban realm, as well as its historical elements. In addition, the book sheds light on the changes brought about by the ECoC event regarding the transformation of Istanbul's image. As a key finding, I would like to underline that Doğan states that

“The symbolic language in the posters includes signs for city of Istanbul and image of Istanbul, but these symbols do not construct a common language of signs. The messages are produced at different levels through different chain of signifiers. There is a difference in the international and domestic advertising campaign of Istanbul 2010” (p. 187).

This could have created the perfect moment for boosting Istanbul's image. However, the book reveals a discrepancy between urban interventions, which have almost separated the city from its built heritage, and the misalignments in how the event was communicated to domestic and international markets.

It goes beyond the scope of this book review to elaborate on all the aspects of the book. Therefore, I have decided to focus on the findings provided by Doğan on the links between visual forms of communication and branding and Istanbul as ECoC 2010. This is because the literature highlights that city marketing and tourism have increasingly turned to using events as a means of marketing places and major cities (Richards & Wilson, 2004). In addition, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2015) have emphasized that “places searching for a brand that distinguishes them from their competitors seize upon the characteristics of the locality, associating themselves with the personalities, events, traditions and relics of the past or the nature of local cultures” (p. 166). In this book, Doğan states that Istanbul ECoC 2010 had an impact on Istanbul's image, but that this impact was not a result of an effective city branding strategy. This is due to the fact that overall place branding activities for Istanbul 2010 were found to be lacking a common language. Several authors argue that the key to a successful place branding exercise is consistency and coherence (see, e.g., Kavaratzis, Warnaby & Ashworth, 2015). Furthermore, like any strategy put to the service of branding a place, such activities need to be guided by a clear strategic direction (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2014). Their effects need to be considered not only in economic terms (Garcia, 2005), but also in terms of strategic spatial planning (Oliveira, 2016). This book contributes to enhancing the multidisciplinary nature of city branding.

As a note for future research, I agree with the author's claim that more research is needed into the links between mega-event communication strategies, place image and its potential brand. Although the case study is explored using a clear methodology and an innovative multi-method framework, in-depth interviews with interested parties and decision-makers in Istanbul would have been fruitful in making this book an even greater source of inspiration for

academics, place makers, urban planners and policy-makers in Turkey, Europe and beyond.

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