CITASLOW MOVEMENT: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDING SMALL TOWNS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Cultural tourism is rapidly gaining widespread acceptance as a real tourist attraction and also emerging as one of the most promising areas of economic development in Turkey. On the basis of Cittaslow movement and focusing on the criteria of Cittaslow movement founded in Italy in 1999 and its possible effects on place branding which is of significant importance for cultural tourism, this study examines how cultural tourism is influential as an economic and social development vehicle in small towns in Turkey and how its local communities can benefit from it by preserving and marketing their cultural assets with the help of Cittaslow movement. The discussion critically examines and discusses the issue of the importance of place branding for cultural tourism. With this purpose, the article obtains a theoretical background to assess Turkey’s cultural tourism, its development and tourism marketing activities from various perspectives within the framework of the cultural tourism, place branding literature and Cittaslow movement. The study is of importance as Cittaslow movement has not been widely known by city marketers, tourism professionals and people of Turkey.

Key Words: Cultural Tourism, Place Marketing, Branding, Cittaslow, Economic Development

Jel Classification: M31, O10

1. Introduction

For the past two decades, Turkey has intensely concentrated on mass tourism, particularly emphasising on a few main destinations which are famous for 3S (sun, sea and sand) products such as Antalya, Muğla, Aydın or İzmir. As capacity has increased gradually day by day in coastal touristic areas, the bargain strength of tour operators, hotels, and big travel agencies has gotten bigger and bigger consequently, bringing an increasing force for lower prices, which have not been wanted for anyone. As a result, increasingly low quality products and services at low prices have been offered and provided to low income tourists, in order to fill up the available capacity these destinations have. This has been an important obstacle for most of Turkish tourism industry and today the new strategies of the Ministry for Turkey focus on reducing the dependence of the destination on the 3S mass tourism markets. Therefore, differentiation is used and specific
values and distinguishing factors of Turkey are introduced via mass media (Alvarez, 2010:127). Various means of communication technology and written press, especially all over Europe, North America and Middle East have been used to reach this aim. The ministry is also stressing on the variety of tourism products and various works and efforts have been conducted to increase the variety of products for tourism, including cultural tourism.

“Cultural tourism has been accepted to be one of the oldest forms of travel and still continues to be a mainstay of the tourism industry which is of vital importance for both national and local economy in most parts of the world, especially ones that are rich in culture. Cultural tourism accounts for around % 40 of all international tourism” (Greg and Munsters, 2010:1). “In most developed countries, industrialization and urbanization have, over the 50 years, mostly changed the landscape for the worse. With the demand for world tourism shifting from mass tourism towards more authentic eco-cultural experiences, many developing countries are finding their unspoiled natural and cultural resources to be a valuable asset for themselves in terms of development. The unique characteristic of tourism as an invisible export activity gives developing countries a rare opportunity to benefit while competing” (Ivanovic, 2008:57). Based on WTO data, as one of the world top tourism destinations, Turkey has been ranked 9th and 10th in terms of international tourism arrivals and tourism revenues in the past years, respectively. On the other hand, according to TUIK data, cultural tourism’s current market share has increased 2-3 percent for the past ten years (Alaeddinoglu and Can, 2009:6). Taking the cultural richness of Turkey into consideration, it has been known and easily said that although cultural tourism has a very huge potential to satisfy national and international tourists, it does not have enough share. Turkey has not been able to use its product variety in cultural tourism to benefit it for both national and local economy.

2. Culture Tourism

It is known that cultural tourism is not new; it has been a motivation for travel, visit and exploration since ancient times, in spite of only among a small minority of the general public. A definition for cultural tourism is as follows: “Visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution” (Lord, 1999:2). Another definition states that “cultural tourism is the travel industry's term describing all travel and visitation activities which are directed at an area's or town’s arts, historical heritage, recreational and natural resources” (www.massculturalcouncil.org). Zeppel and Hall (1991) states that “Cultural and heritage tourism represent a major area of growth in the special interest tourism market. Cultural
tourism assets are various, including museums, art galleries, historic theme parks, and heritage sites and arts festivals”.

“When tourists are introduced to an indigenous culture, they certainly provide economic opportunities and employment in areas of the world that might otherwise struggle financially. It’s even possible that cultural tourism has allowed particular cultures to thrive in instances where they might have otherwise faded into nonexistence” (Haugen, 2010). Scientific research and empirical studies also shows that increasing international tourism arrivals which can be good, sustainable and continuous is a way to generate more money than oil. Also, it is a fact that development of cultural tourism is an alternative to oil based income and economy (Pourafkari, 2009:1). There are a lot of factors increasing cultural tourism. On this subject, Lord (1992) explains that there are some emerging trends impacting cultural tourism positively. These trends are:

• “Increase in get-away trips
• Impact of “Gen-x” tourists
• Emphasis on meaning
• Increasing expectations
• Desire for sustainability
• Millennium events
• Impact of the Internet”

Owing to these trends, cultural tourism is gaining acceptance globally. Today, the tourism industry is also increasingly recognizing the importance of cultural and heritage resources and try to market them effectively. Cultural tourism has become a development means for many rural and faraway places to support traditional industries that are disappearing day by day especially owing to the effects of technology and globalization. There are lots of statements stressing the importance of cultural tourism for whole country and its local people.

Recent tourism research indicates clearly that cultural tourists are a force to be considered and reckoned with because:

• “Cultural Tourism is the fastest growing sector of the travel industry.
• Cultural Tourists spend $62 more per day and $200 more per trip than other travelers.
• Cultural Tourists include multiple destinations during a visit and stay one half-day longer at each destination.
• Cultural Tourists have higher levels of income” (www.massculturalcouncil.org).

“Cultural tourism is becoming locally more important day by day because the growing importance of the local is at least partly a result of globalization. First, in the face of globalization, localities find it increasingly important to assert their identity. Second, localities need to use their cultural assets to generate distinction, in order to attract investment and people and also gain economic
development. Finally, in a globalising world, the ‘local’ is seen as more authentic. Cultural tourism is often equated with ‘local’ culture or heritage, which is ‘distinctive’ and ‘authentic’. Cultural tourism is positioned as a ‘good’ form of tourism, in contrast to ‘bad’ forms of tourism, such as beach tourism, backpacking, mass tourism, etc.” (www.aumed.net).

Generally speaking, cultural tourism is developing at a remarkable speed and diversifies continuously all over the world, especially in Europe and Asia. It causes city and town tourism to boom and helps economic and social development and conservation in rural areas. It also maintains and improves the quality of life of the indigenous people. Thus, as it can be inferred, cultural tourism is of significant importance for places which have potential to attract tourists.

3. Culture Richness and Tourism in Turkey

“Although Turkey has also become a popular destination for culture, spa, congress and health care tourism recently, unfortunately, Turkish tourism has been long restricted within the “sea-sun-beach” triangle. But nowadays, the number of tourists who visit towns which are famous for their rich historical and cultural heritage which are of vital importance is growing day by day. The number of tourists that visited Mardin grew tenfold in four years to reach 600,000. Cultural tourism have great potential in Turkey that already obtains a great deal of income by means of coastal tourism, as local prices are considerably lower than those of European countries. Through promotional advertisements, mass media and cultural events supported by Turkish governments all over Asia, Europe and Americas, tourists are flocking to Anatolia that harbors a rich array of cultures, natural beauties and religions” (www.turks.us). The boom in the numbers of tourists who aims at exploring the cultural assets of Turkey has been increasing to a great extent and this increase is really fascinating. To support this assertion, it is enough to check the formal statistics prepared by official institutions. Looking at the figures given by the Turkish Tourism Ministry, it can be seen easily that the number of tourists reaching and visiting to Turkey for culture tourism grows rapidly. Not only European tourists but also tourists from all around Turkey rush to towns that are rich in culture on short tours. The number of tourists visiting and exploring Mardin, Hatay, Tarsus, Diyarbakır, Hasankeyf and Şanlıurfa, which have important centers for all major religions exceeded one million over the last ten years. Safranbolu, Beypazarı, Mudanya, Mengen, Kaş, Silifke, Tire, Selçuk, Bergama, Doğubeyazıt, Akyaka, Kaş, Develi attract more tourists than ever due to their cultural richness.

There are other places which have big potential for cultural tourism. For example, Mount Nemrut home to the 2000 year-old huge sculptures. These invaluable sculptures known as the “8th Wonder of the World” is
Adiyaman’s most important touristic assets. The region has also many facilities and possibilities for other leisure and sport activities in addition to its rich culture, such as walking, paragliding, camping, climbing and water sports in the region. These sport activities are rapidly gaining acceptance among tourists who would like to visit the region.

“Among the many tourist regions that are located far from the sea but have important cultural value, Cappadocia, in the Central Anatolian province of Nevşehir, is of special interest to both domestic and international tourists. Its fascinating natural rock formations, called “fairy chimneys,” and splendid valley views are a strong draw, as are its rock-carved boutique hotels and high level of service quality. Despite all these advantages it has, nevertheless, the region has not been able to reach its full tourism potential yet” (www.hurriyetdailynews.com). There are other places, towns and cities which have potential cultural tourism. Towns in Bursa, Bolu, Van, Kastamonu, Kütahya, Ankara, Çanakkale, Aydın and in many other cities are rich in cultural products which are important assets for tourism.

4. Place Branding

“Now everybody is speaking of sustainability of cultural tourism, eco-tourism or rural tourism. To achive this sustainability and benefit permanently, there are some facts that have to be taken into account. Place branding is among them. In marketing literature, we can encounter different definitions for place branding. For example, one of them explains that place branding is the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural development of cities, regions and countries” (www.palgrave-journals.com). “Another definition states that the term "place branding" may refer to a city, town, country or a tourist destination and to their competition and struggle for tourists, visitors, investors, residents and other resources. Place branding is based on a strategic approach to public relations, stating that a change of image is an ongoing, holistic, interactive and wide-scale process, requiring much more than a quick change of logo or slogan” (Wikipedia).

Place branding is of vital importance for cultural marketing efforts. To have a good brand name and position of the destination and its indigenous tourism products, focusing on features which are distinctive and superior to its rivals is necessary. There are lots of cities trying to design the mix of marketing and promotional tools and techniques to achieve a good place branding and the greatest level of conversion of the market potential. Many small towns all over the world have realized the importance of place branding and therefore they have been started to be promoted as a tourism destination worldwide by their councils, emphasising on place
branding. Supported also by the governments, their promoting programmes within tourism marketing aim at improving the towns’ social and economic development through their rich cultures and heritages with the help of an effective place branding. They also make market research to validate the efforts for branding cities or places for cultural tourism since they believe that small towns should have an established brand and presence on the potential target markets and efforts should be done on the brand positioning as cultural tourism destination on markets.

5. Cittaslow Movement
The Cittaslow (Slow City) movement was founded in Italy in 1999 and now has over 120 member towns internationally.

“As new and developing movement Cittaslow emphasises local distinctiveness and sustainability and seeks to improve local ‘quality of life’ in a context of what its leaders see as a homogenising globalisation process. It practices a form of indirect activism. Rather than involving direct confrontation (such as demonstrations and the like) this entails the dissemination of its model for local governance through the recruitment of member towns. It is actually Town Councils that become members of the Cittaslow movement. Simultaneously Cittaslow is represented in Town Councils in the form of a local Cittaslow committee (which in the UK is a formally constituted committee of the council). The committee membership is made up of the local Cittaslow leaders and representatives of key local public, voluntary and commercial organisations and bodies. To achieve accreditation as a Cittàslow member the town council must assess its town, and score at least 50 percent against specified criteria concerning its environmental and infrastructure policies, the quality of urban fabric, encouragement of local produce, hospitality and community and creation of Cittàslow awareness. Cittaslow towns have to have populations of less than 50,000. The sorts of projects and activities which Cittaslow leaders initiate in order to develop their towns include celebratory events such as carnival, food and music festivals and shared meals, projects such as the development of local sites of land or the setting up of food cooperatives or networks, activities such as training young people in ‘traditional’ skills and, in one case, taking them on a trip to demonstrate their cooking skills at an Italian food festival, and regular events such as monthly farmers’ markets and craft markets.” (Pink, 2008:163).

“Cittaslow is a growing international network of over 150 towns in 20 countries across the world that have adopted a set of common goals and principles to enhance their quality of life for residents and visitors. In simple terms, Cittaslow towns aim to be great places to live, work and visit. They aim to support local businesses, foster local traditions, protect the
environment, welcome visitors, and encourage active participation in community life. Each Cittaslow town commits to working towards a set of over 50 goals and principles that aim to improve its quality of life. These goals and principles provide tangible benchmarks against which a town can measure its progress and act as a mechanism to bring local people from all walks of life together to work collectively for the good of their town” (www.cittaslow.org.uk).

“Slow Food, which is the source of Cittaslow movement, has gained considerable attention as a social movement trying to counteract increasing globalisation in eating habits and food production. Cittásslow, a network of towns, are working with qualitative local urban development, based on similar principles as Slow Food” (Jan Henrik Nilsson et al 2011). Cittaslow integrates the past with contemporary lifestyles while embracing progress and change when sustainable.

“There are over 60 different criteria that any town applying to join Cittaslow must seek to address. These are split into 6 broad headings: Environment policies, Infrastructure policies, Enhancing the quality of the urban fabric, Celebrating and promoting local produce and local products, Hospitality & community, Communicating awareness and understanding of Cittaslow” (http://www.pkc.gov.uk).

The following criteria for cittaslow are of great importance in terms of cultural tourism as they help cultural values preserve and maintain:

1. “Plans for improving and for the reclamation of historical centers and/or works of cultural or historical value
2. Certification of the quality of artisan produced products and objects and artistic crafts.
3. Programs for the safeguarding of artisan and/or artistic craft products in danger of extinction.
4. Safeguarding traditional methods of work and professions at a risk of extinction.
5. Preservation of local traditions in restaurants, protected structures, school cafeterias.
6. FAVORING THE ACTIVITIES OF DRINKS AND GASTRONOMIC SLOW FOOD COMMITTEE FOR SPECIES AND PREPARATIONS RISKING EXTINCTION.
7. Census of the typical products of the territory and support of their commercialization (updating of markets for local products, creation of appropriate spaces).
8. Census of trees in the city and enhancing the value of large trees or “historical trees”.
9. Promoting and preserving local cultural events.
10. Promoting “urban” and school gardens for autochthonous cultures grown with traditional methods.
11. Implementing one or more projects for species or productions with the risk of extinction.

12. Use of local area products safeguarded by Slow Food and maintenance of nutritional traditions in collective food service, in protected structures, schools canteens with annexed food education programmes and support to the typical local area products.

13. Different educational programmes for cultural tastes and nutrition for the compulsory and vocational secondary schools in cooperation with Slow Food” (www.cittaslowseferihisar.org).

“No town applying to join Cittaslow is expected to meet all of the criteria immediately. It is acknowledged that all towns will require time to address every criterion. However, each town that would like to join the movement is required to outline how it will address any criteria that it does not initially meet. In general, it is about sharing local crafts, tastes, and arts with our children and guests and not just leaving them as memoirs belonging to older generations. The use of clean and renewable energy resources that are not harmful to the environment and people and their cultural and historical values, are encouraged in member countries of Cittaslow association. In Turkey, the concept of Cittaslow became a road map for local governments, and protects the future of the towns. The Cittaslow concept prevents individuals from forgetting their traditions and customs in the name of becoming fast and modern as well as conserving the values of the city for unplanned urbanization, earning money and becoming a part of globalisation” (www.cittaslowseferihisar.org).

As it can be easily realized, most of the criteria from cittaslow movement are related to preservation of the cultural assets which are vital for cultural tourism. Because cittaslow movement tries to prevent the disappearing of local characteristics and features, the standards of local area and their own life styles, and the city texture which is different from others, the small towns of Cittaslow movement protect their characteristics and their unique identities and properties. They do not want to lose their values which are of great importance for diversity and stay away from the destructive and assimilating effects of globalisation which may cause them to vanish in the process of globalization. Cittaslow towns always try to develop various strategies to conserve their own features.

Discussion and Conclusion

Increasingly, tourism is viewed as the largest industry in the world and it has been projected to be the world’s largest employer in the following years. It is believed that cultural tourism offers enormous opportunities for the creation of growth, economic and social development and wealth to destinations and its local communities. Clearly, Turkey certainly has many features which make it attractive to
international tourists—local culture, historical assets, sea, cuisine, good weather, warm people, geography and even its importance in terms of three major religions. It is also obvious that one of Turkey’s most abundant resources are the people and their diverse cultures. Turkey is a country with an outstanding wealth in terms of cultural heritage assets and tourism potential.

“Turkey must realize how important it is in terms of European tourists. Because it appears that discovering Turkey nowadays is a way of rediscovering Europe’s historical and cultural wealth. It is then Turkey before the Turks that European people are really interested in, Constantinople rather than Istanbul, and Anatolia or Mesopotamia, rather than Turkey. Organizers, when promoting tourism in Turkey, focus on the sites from the Bible (Mount Ararat) or the Iliad (Troy), or Istanbul’s Roman and Byzantine past. Greek, Roman and Christian remains attract more attention than anything else” (Tutal, 2003: 42).

However, cultural tourism in Turkey needs new initiations and perspectives. Despite the tourist popularity of visiting heritage sites and participating in cultural activities, relatively little detailed attention has been given to the cultural and heritage tourism phenomenon. It has been only recent that people’s cultures have begun to be realized, appreciated and acknowledged for tourism potential they have. Turkey’s rich culture is not adequately well known globally and this affects the cultural tourism products in Turkey. The marketing and the promotion of its rich cultural treasures are very important issues for it. Turkey should be deeply interested in protecting, discovering and better managing the country’s rich cultural heritage, to support its own economic and cultural development. Many Anatolian towns that are rich in historical and cultural attractions have been fairly underdeveloped in terms of tourism. Although cultural tourism has a broader presence throughout Turkey, most of the small towns can not achieve to become a brand in terms of cultural tourism due to lack of suitable marketing activities.

A major obstacle in towns’ abilities to benefit their tourism potential is their lack of a well-known and defined brands and also the lack of organizations in terms of branding and marketing management seems to be another important problem. In this sense, we could foresee and understand the advantages of Cittaslow movements in the process of becoming a good brand.

“The ‘slow’ movements could be expected to have influences on tourism development. This possible connection has been neglected in the scientific tourism literature. The Cittaslow concept may have an indirect potential for tourism development by improving product development, local identity and increased visibility” (Nilsson et al 2011). As can be understood from the study, by looking at the criteria of Cittaslow (www.cittaslow.com), the
following statements can be concluded for towns which are trying to gain membership for Cittaslow movements.

- “Cittaslow town could achieve differentiation from other destinations since they focus on authenticity, hospitality, cultural diversity.
- They could have a brand identity specially designed to attract tourism and can be marketed as culture tourism destinations.
- Marketing plans for the effective promotion of the towns could be reached easily and rapidly and unique products of these towns can be branded accordingly.
- Cittaslow town can ensure the conservation and appropriate use of irreplaceable cultural and heritage resources to maximize the long term benefits of cultural and heritage tourism.
- Promotional efforts of cittaslow towns could be better directed at cultural tourism products, rather than mass tourism, in contrast to past endeavors.
- Cittaslow towns may better consider market characteristics of the cultural tourism sector, strategies for marketing cultural tourism.
- Careful planning, creative partnerships and strategic alliances by Cittaslow may help towns use the power of cultural tourism to benefit cultural, heritage and tourism operators throughout Turkey.
- Cittaslow is “sustainable tourism in practice”. Its philosophy takes specific actions to enhance tourism directly.
- Cittaslow movement not only preserve the local culture but also increase incomes for the people of small towns contributing to the realization of poverty reduction at a localized level. It may reduce income disparities between people of small towns and the cities.
- Cittaslow helps towns identify, protect and also enhance an exceptional heritage, threatened with disappearance, particularly in the face of the uniformity frequently brought about by globalization.
- Cittaslow saves the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, often in an emergency situation, when it is threatened by conflict, natural disasters, the passage of time, economic expansion and mere human negligence.
- Cittaslow improves cultural tourism which can provide an appreciable means of communication and dialogue between individuals and civilizations, as well as an economic activity and a means of presenting and enhancing the heritage.
- Cittaslow saves and maintains distinctive characteristics of places, which can help cultural tourism develop.
- Focusing on Cittaslow movement, towns in Turkey as emerging destinations may
have the chance to start on the right foot with their sustainability programs.

- Cittaslow can contribute to economic growth. In addition to increasing private incomes, this economic growth also generate additional resources that can be used to improve social services such as healthcare, safe drinking water, etc.”

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