

CITY BRANDING: HIDDEN DETAILS IN THE RHETORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF PÉCS and RUHR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the concept of the city branding with a particular focus on the visuals and texts representing the positioning of the cities. Pécs from Hungary and Ruhr from Germany, two cities that tried to re-brand themselves through European Capital of Culture (ECoC) event in 2010, are chosen as the subjects of this study. The study first considers the historical and socio-political background of Pécs and Ruhr. Then through semiotic analysis examines photos, logos, slogans, informational texts and authorities' declarations on the official ECoC Web sites and program books of the mentioned cities from a critical point of view, with the objective of unveiling the symbolic elements in differentiating the city brands.

Keywords: City branding, Semiotic analysis, European Capital of Culture, Pécs, Ruhr

Şehir Markalaması: Pécs ve Ruhr'un Retorik Sunumlarında Gizli Ayrıntılar

ÖZET

Bu çalışma şehirlerin konumlandırılmalarını betimleyen görseller ve yazılı metinlere odaklanarak şehir markası kavramını irdelemektedir. Çalışmada 2010 yılının Avrupa Kültür Başkentleri olarak kendilerini yeniden markalamaya çalışan Macaristan'ın Pécs ve Almanya'nın Ruhr kentleri ele alınmıştır. Pécs ve Ruhr'un tarihsel ve sosyo-politik altyapısının incelenmesinin ardından sözü edilen kentlerin Avrupa Kültür Başkenti resmi Web sitelerinden ve program kitaplarından elde edilen fotoğraf, logo, slogan, bilgi verici yazılar ve yetkililerin açıklamaları göstergebilimsel yöntemle analiz edilmiştir. Şehir markalarını farklılaştırmak için ortaya konan sembolik unsurları açığa çıkarmak amacıyla veriler eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla sorgulanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Şehir markalaması, Göstergebilimsel analiz, Avrupa Kültür Başkenti, Pécs, Ruhr

Introduction

City branding, which is regarded as a strategic instrument to publicize a city's competitive advantages (Zhang and Zhao, 2009: 245) is gaining much more interest both from academics and professionals of communication and urban issues. Cities would like to attract

visitors, investors, talented people and inhabitants and compete among themselves internationally. In the widest sense, city branding refers to the application of branding techniques to geographical locations. Since branding deals with mental images, positioning is an important concept in this process. Branding strategies aim to form a picture in the minds of public not only with the visuals but also with all kinds of rhetorical devices such as slogans, texts and speeches. Through ‘mega-events’ such as Olympic Games and Capital of Culture events, cities find a chance to create new narratives -or associations- of regeneration based on the values they want to promote and re-brand their cities.

A city can be viewed as an “entity”, to which an “identity” is ascribed with a set of stable values cultivated from the long course of urban development (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). City branding needs to synthesize various characteristics and to transform them into a unique and irreplaceable identity (Smidt-Jensen, 2006). According to Ashworth (2009: 9) one of the objectives of city or place branding is to discover or create uniqueness, which makes a city distinct from others.

City branding is a multi-dimensional concept depending on various aspects such as culture, socio-economic situation of the country and politics. A city’s brand is firstly created and then perceived by multiple stakeholders –authorities, visitors, inhabitants...etc.- and it is highly affected and managed by the authorities holding political power. Thus, this study focuses on the representation of the city brand by the authorities via visual and textual messages, rather than the perceived brands of the cities.

It should be noted that European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2010, Pécs (from Hungary) and Ruhr¹ (from Germany) are clear examples for the inclination of European Union (EU) as showcasing non-traditional cultural capitals. Since the selection of Glasgow as ECoC in 1990, many of the cities nominated for the Cultural Capital designation have also been 'non-traditional' cultural centres, such as Antwerp, Thessaloniki, Bergen, Reikjavik, Rotterdam, Porto, Genoa and Lille (Richards, 2000:169). It is this study’s contention that Hungary and Germany as members of the EU, would like to position their cities as new European cultural center of attraction for various publics by utilizing ECoC event as a catalyst.

¹ Pécs and Ruhr were chosen as ECoC in 2010 together with Istanbul. However this study does not take the city of Istanbul as the subject since Istanbul, being a traditional cultural capital, is a different case.

In order to uncover micro-level messages representing the 'identity' of the city, the study considers the case of Pécs and Ruhr. In doing so, study utilizes semiotic analysis.

Methodology

As Moffit (2004) asserts, semiotics is a critical theoretical approach that may be utilized in close textual analysis of campaign messages in public relations. Ainsworth and Hardy (2004:156) claim that language and other symbols in advertising, public relations, issue management and marketing can be used in order to construct organizational identities. This idea is valid for the city identities, as well.

This study applies semiotic analysis in order to interpret the meanings generated by photos, logos, slogans, informational texts and authorities' declarations on the official ECoC Web sites and program books of Pécs and Ruhr. These meanings are claimed to be associated with the positioning of the cities that reflect city identities.

The methodology of the study is based on the work of Saussure (1974, 1983) whereas paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis are applied to textual and visual signs in order to reveal the symbolic elements related with the positioning of Pécs and Ruhr.

Semiotics provides a set of tools that can be used to look in detail at a single text. According to Roland Barthes (1972), a sign is a combination of some idea or object that is represented (the signified) and an image or word that represents it (the signifier) (as cited in Blaney and Wolfe, 2004: 267). This analysis questions why a particular signifier rather than a workable alternative was used in a specific context. Saussure noted that a characteristic of what he called 'associative' relations - what would now be called paradigmatic relations - was that (in contrast to syntagmatic relations) such relations held '*in absentia*' - in the absence from a specific text of alternative signifiers from the same paradigm (Saussure 1983:122; Saussure 1974:123 as cited in Chandler, 2007). He also argued that signs take their value within the linguistic system from what they are *not* (Saussure 1983:115; Saussure 1974: 117 as cited in Chandler, 2007).

Paradigmatic analysis is a structuralist technique that seeks to identify the various paradigms, which underlie the 'surface structure' of a text. This aspect of structural analysis involves a consideration of the positive or negative connotations of each signifier (revealed through the use of one signifier rather than another), and the existence of 'underlying'

thematic paradigms (e.g. binary oppositions such as public/private) (Chandler, 2007: 39; <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem-gloss.html>).

While Moffitt (2011: 26) asserts that semiotics is a valuable theory and method for the reason that it ensures concrete and measurable data off the surfaces of the texts, this paper aims to unveil the visual and textual symbolic elements generated by the city authorities. In the following parts positioning of Pécs and Ruhr are analyzed respectively.

The Borderless City: Pécs

Pécs is a 2000 years old city in the South Transdanubian Region of southeast Hungary, close to the border with Croatia. The city has about 160,000 inhabitants and it has always been ethnically diverse. There have been different layers of culture, thus, traditions and values of nationalities have been merging through the city's history of 2000 years. Hungarians, Croatians, and Germans have been living together in rich cultural polarity. Pécs was awarded the UNESCO Prize 'Cities for Peace' in 1998 for cherishing different cultures and for its tolerant attitudes towards the fugitives of the Balkan Wars. http://www.Pécs2010.hu/Home/Press/Fact_figures

Concepts of multiculturalism, maintaining the cultures of the minorities and tolerance towards them are dominant in the branding of Pécs. The reason of this discourse can be understood after a glance at the historical background of the city as publicized on its website:

The building blocks of the past are of Latin, Turkish, German, Croatian and Hungarian origin, today the town is the most important Hungarian venues for the German, Croatian and Roma culture. Nine ethnic minority governments operate here (German, Roma, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Polish, Greek, Ukrainian, Ruthenian). Pécs is the most important town for the culture of Hungarian Germans. It is the only town in Hungary where education is provided in Roma language from the nursery to the University. Cultures that had no connection at all coexist in Pécs and in its region; this is the meeting point of West European, Balkan, German and Turkish cultures. The old German name of the area (*Schwäbische Türkei*) stands as a memento to this unusual cultural conjunction. The cultural layers of the town have settled in a curious order: The culture of Pécs was Latin when the university was established (1367), it was Turkish in the 17th century, German and Latin at the end of the 18th century and primarily Hungarian in the 20th century. When you walk through town you walk across a mass of cultural zones. The Turkish mosque standing on the main square is now a Catholic church. The Turkish half moon and the Catholic cross on the top of the mosque symbolise very well the coexistence of cultures in the town. (http://en.Pécs.hu/cikk/0839/966906/20080922_Pécs_2010_3.htm)

Pécs would like to position itself like a peaceful, harmonious and culturally rich place based on the city's history. The ECoC title is embraced by this not well-known, small, historical city to present itself to various publics with a strong culturally shaped city brand. As mentioned in the Project Book, Pécs has always been open to receiving and accepting different cultures, and this tradition is still an integral part of its values (p.13). Even though the city has a meaningful cultural value, this is not understood well in Europe. Cultural director of ECoC 2010 event in Hungary, Zsaly, mentions as follows: 'I also believe that the widening and deepening of the international relationships of Pécs is extremely important, since this is how the city can make its mark on the cultural map of Europe' (p.31). When the statement is analyzed paradigmatically it is understood that the usage of the verb 'can make its mark...' creates a meaning that the city does not already have a mark on the cultural map of Europe. Actually there seems to be a dilemma here: Pécs is nominated as an ECoC, although it is not recognized as a cultural place in Europe. The situation becomes an objective for the city's ECoC agency: Placing their city at the cultural map of Europe by the help of international relations. As mentioned before in this article, the ECoC program has gained a new role as a catalyst for urban regeneration after the selection of Glasgow in 1990. The title has been given to the cities that are not culturally known, but that want to brand themselves through culture and Pécs is an example of this trend.

During this regeneration process the umbrella theme that Pécs has adopted is that of the 'Borderless City'. The meaning is explained through a sentence in the marketing strategy booklet "... it would like to represent Hungarian culture and receive the countless shades of European and world cultures, presenting the culture of a European frontier region and at the same time showing that culture knows no borders." (p.73) Additionally it is claimed that,

Pécs will be the first Cultural Capital of Europe to open a gateway to the rich multiculturalism of the Balkans, including its Islamic heritage - in a period of time when the borders of the European Union will be extended towards the Balkan states. The city will be a gateway between cultures of the West and the East, presenting different cultural experiences. (p.23)

In 'Pécs will be the first Cultural Capital...' statement the use of third person, future tense and a volitional verb creates a speech act with an assertion. The tone continues with the assertion of being a gateway between the East and the West. The city finds itself powerful as to undertake the mission of spanning the boundaries between the Eastern and the Western cultures. The word 'gateway' is strategically chosen and it represents the differentiation point

of the city of Pécs, that indicates being in the midst of various cultures and providing a transition amongst them.

Another reason for the selection of such a theme is that Pécs is claimed to build bridges between neighbouring cities. The proposal submitted by Pécs does not only represent the city itself but both its narrow (the South Transdanubian) and its broader region (the Southern Cultural Zone). The South Transdanubian region is included in the program on grounds that Pécs is the seat of decentralization and regionalism in Hungary.

As a summary of the experiences provided by the events of the preparatory years it can be established that the regional role of the city has become stronger partly as a result of involving villages and cities in the neighbourhood of Pécs and partly because these programmes have paved the way to the establishment of the “cultural bridge” planned to be built towards the Southern Cultural Zone, and created or strengthened the network-like forms of cooperation. The actual realization of the objectives of the “borderless city” in 2010 defined in the application is ensured by these efforts. http://www.Pecs2010.hu/file/StaticPages/nyilvanos_dokumentumok/monitoring-report_22-04-2009.pdf

By being selected as ECoC, the small city of Pécs undertakes the mission of representing the culture of a whole region, where there is a cultural blend. From the point of a new city brand creation this mission is a burden. Pécs is like the clever and hardworking student of the classroom, elected to represent the whole school. The situation is a challenge for the city that can either benefit or be damaged by this process. Pécs' location is certainly ideal in terms of geo-politics and cultural traditions. It is seeking to find its place and intermediary role in a system of interrelations that goes beyond the country's borders. It is a known fact that in the face of political-economic disagreements between nations, culture can bond people living on both sides of the borders. Hence, an interpretation of the word “borderless” denotes a spiritual crossing of the border, as the common language of art and culture can generate a new relationship between countries and people. Thus Pécs choosing a powerful, friendly and including theme as the ‘borderless city’ for branding, is congruent with the strenghts of the city, as well.

Each city produces a logo in the ECoC process. The logo serves as a tool enabling the city to brand itself simultaneously as distinctive and recognizable. A logo identifies, distinguishes and communicates. It also portrays the values and the goals. Pécs has chosen a very stylistic logo (Figure 1).

Even though the logo emphasizes the word 'borderless' with its frameless type, the visual dominance of parallel black lines consisting the name of the city can be associated with the walls of a labyrinth and eventually can have a negative connotation. It is not possible to read the city name at first sight. This iconic symbol can be perceived like a barcode, as well. In that case, the city is reflected as a mercantile product apart from the idea that the city is a connection, which bonds different cultures. Black, white and red colors trilogy and the corners in the typography create a sense of formality, seriousness, uniformity and post-modernity. Hence, there is a dissonance between the tone of the thematic messages and the feeling created by the logo. While target publics are exposed to visual and linguistic messages simultaneously and finally shape their perceptions on a given subject, the discrepancy between the theme and the logo might affect branding in a negative way.

Figure 1. Logo of Pécs 2010 ECoC



Certainly meaning is never to be simply found in any image or visual text itself, it is also to be located in the discourses that contextualize and constitute the image or text (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001 as cited in Aiello and Thurlow, 2006: 151). Figure 2 shows the pictures of architectural heritage of Pécs printed on the interior cover of program book.

Figure 2. Interior Cover of Pécs Program Book (p.8-9)



The first two photos belong to a mosque, the third photo is a shot from Necropolis of Sopiana which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These photographic resources are discrete manifestations of culture. They are metonymic as the meaning of these images is inevitably realized through selection and exclusion, additionally they are unavoidably ideological (Aiello and Thurlow, 2006). In the first photo which is an interior shot from the mosque, the obtuse angle permits the visibility of decorative and architectural details, including a cross at the top. The symbol is quite metonymic, it designates that this place functions as a church since the population of the city is Christian in majority. In the second photo there is an exterior shot of a mosque. This photo does not belong to Gazi Kasim Pasha Mosque which is one of the most prominent landmarks of the city of Pécs, instead it is the photo of a relatively less important building, Jakovali Hassan Mosque. There is an interesting detail, such as there is a minaret behind the dome. It should not have been interesting if there was an existing minaret at Gazi Kasim Pasha Mosque, however the minaret of the mosque was brought down centuries ago. Yet on this page a photo of a mosque *with* a minaret was preferred, while a mosque *without* a minaret should have been less representative about the religion. The third photo represents the first Christian cemeteries in Sophinae. The photo accentuates the ancient history of the city. While Pécs is proud of its roots, reads culture with strong bonds to religion- mostly Christianity-. The privilege of certain mythologies not only reflects about its culture but also about being a part of the Europe. The past here is represented as a strategic claim to a shared heritage, which signifies a shared contemporary European identity created through an ancient past.

In spite of inconsistent messages through various visual and textual sources, the city is moderately successful in positioning itself as a new cultural center of Europe with a rich historical heritage. As Bakucz (2011) concluded, The ECoC project was important for the city, serving as the potential creator of an image for Pécs as a world-class centre of culture, education and intellectual resources (p.58).

New in Europe: The Ruhr Metropolis

The Ruhrgebiet, or Ruhr, is an urban area in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. It is not strictly an administrative or political entity, it is geographically defined as extending from the left bank of the Rhine east to Hamm and from the Ruhr River north to the Lippe. The Ruhr functions chiefly as a supplier of water and is dammed in many places to form lakes and

reservoirs. It is a megalopolis comprising 53 cities and 5.3 million inhabitants from 170 nations. It is, in total, the third largest conurbation in the European Union after London and Paris. The Ruhr coalfield is one of the world's largest. Steel production and diversified chemical manufacturing constitute the other basic industries of the region. Although settlement in the area dates back to the Paleolithic period and coal mining to before the Middle Ages, the Ruhr's industrial importance dates from the early 19th century. Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex in Essen, an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/512476/Ruhr>.

Cultural section editor of Der Spiegel magazine, Katja Thimm (2010) comments on Ruhr and prefers to call it not a city but a megapolis with one common point which is mining. She underlines the lack of a single identity as follows:

It is a region where loyalty to one's football club trumps loyalty to the region, and where residents are more likely to identify themselves as Schalke fans or Dortmund fans than as Ruhr residents. Even the dialect sounds different on every corner, despite sounding more or less the same to outsiders, with some residents speaking with a stronger Westphalian accent, while others have a touch of the Lower Rhine region or even Poland in their speech. <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/204081-ruhr-coal-culture>

According to Thimm (2010), coal and steel has become part of what is referred to as culture in the Ruhr. The miners' apartments have become historic landmarks, and the Zollverein², once a hot, noisy place, is now a monument to the community and has even been named a World Cultural Heritage site. With high unemployment rates and idle factories, the region is hoping culture can help it get back on track and the title "Capital of Culture" is intended as the vehicle (Thimm, 2010).

In light of this background information, it is possible to analyze the guiding theme of Ruhr : "Change through Culture". Ruhr would like to create a new metropolis –not a city- by using culture as a leverage. The remarkable idea in this statement is 'change'. The aim here is to leave the old Ruhr brand identified with industry, coal, steel and mining behind and recreate the industrial places with a new soul fed by a cultural understanding. The most interesting example for this is the Zollverein coal mine industrial complex. Zollverein once

² The Zollverein industrial complex in Land Nordrhein-Westfalen consists of the complete infrastructure of a historical coal-mining site, with some 20th-century buildings of outstanding architectural merit. It constitutes remarkable material evidence of the evolution and decline of an essential industry over the past 150 years. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/975>

the largest coal mine in Europe and now has been transformed into a symbol for change through culture.

To be seen as industrial is associated with the old, polluted, and out of date. According to Griffiths (2006), the success of Glasgow in re-branding the city by using the ECoC event has encouraged other de-industrializing cities to try the cultural capital route to a more secure post-industrial future. Similar to other declining industrial centers without a major cultural reputation (Griffiths, 2006) the strategy of “Ruhr 2010” is to pursue cultural and political innovation, particularly within the creative industries domain. The objective of the program is mentioned in the program book as “bringing together different cultures, nationalities and generations, perhaps giving rise to the emotional moment at which the Ruhr Metropolis becomes truly established” (p.5). As Palonen (2010) agrees what Glasgow did in terms of seeking a new post-industrialist identity through culture and heritage- Ruhr 2010 is trying to do the same for the whole region by drawing from its heritage of mining.

‘The Metropolis is a reality which no longer needs to be built, but must now be re-designed’ is the motto explained on the official internet site of Ruhr. This slogan situated on the website banner, is visible at first sight: ‘New in Europe: The Ruhr Metropolis’. For the Ruhr region it is possible to say that ECoC event is a catalyst for re-branding and every voice is screaming the same tune of regeneration.

Every city brand needs some landmarks. While Ruhr is creating a new city brand, it is common to have a new landmark reflecting the new attitudes related with ‘Ruhr Metropolis’ idea (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Angerpark Landmark, “Tiger & Turtle/Magic Mountain“ / Design: Heike Mutter & Ulrich Genth/Duisburg Office Capital of Culture RUHR.2010



Figure 3 indicates a picture of the new landmark for the Ruhr Metropolis in the form of a rollercoaster. *Tiger&Turtle/Magic Mountain* is a giant rollercoaster-inspired sculpture that can be climbed up and walked on. The material of the sculpture is steel and zinc which makes a reference to industrial background of Ruhr. While the visitors climb and walk on the structure, they are able to observe the landscape from a new and different perspective. This new landmark signifies Ruhr's heavy innovative reserves and openness towards post-modern multi-art contents, as well.

Figure 4. Logo of Ruhr.2010



Another visual representation of Ruhr is its logo (Figure 4). The logo with a colorful pattern of flags represents the combination of the cities which form the Ruhr region. Different but harmonious colors constitute a graphical map of the region. 'Ruhr' name is readable with its plain typeface and color. The year and ECoC word is printed in a relatively weak color. Analyzed semiotically, the connotation here might be the power and priority of the city; not the year or the event. Paradigmatic analysis of various colors –instead of black&white – indicate dynamism and change. As regeneration and redevelopment of the region was the core of the Ruhr.2010 project, the authorities would like to transform the region into a European cultural metropolis and transform its 'black image' (in connection with coal and mining industry) into a colorful image expressing dynamism and youth.

Ruhr 2010 utilizes ECoC event as an instrument for re-branding the city. Positioning of Ruhr is depending on the city's innovative power generated from creative industries built over the ashes of a heavy industrial background. Openness towards various insights, dynamism and being a part of the post-modern world are other dimensions of the new Ruhr brand.

Conclusion

The compatibility of various messages given from various channels is considerable in city branding process. Success of branding depends on the well management of messages from those channels.

Referring to various discourses of the authorities, the theme, the logo and partially, visual representation of the program via photographic resources, it is possible to say that Pécs would like to brand itself by positioning the city as a livable, real European city respectful to cultural diversities, undertaking the responsibility of building bridges among different cultures, which is a target of EU. In the chorus of diverse voices, the sound of the logo is detuned and unable to go along with other harmonic message resources. While Hungary is respectively among the newer members (since 2004) of the EU, Pécs puts a strong emphasis on being a borderless city, trying to serve as the ideal of European integration by its multicultural tradition and openness to various ethnicities and minorities. The ECoC became a tool for Pécs as well – for urban renewal and local economy and identity, not only for the promotion of culture or “Europe”. Identification with Europe was complemented with notions of progress, heritage, post-industrial culture, and local flavor, as Palonen (2010) asserts.

Consequently, the meaning created by the new landmark, the general theme of Ruhr.2010 and the logo are totally compatible and they are all together working for the sake of a brand new Ruhr Metropolis at the heart of Europe as a culturally important destination. Depending on the analysis made on the coordination of various visual and textual messages, it is possible to say that Ruhr is successful in managing the resources while aiming to regenerate a new city brand apart from its former industrial positioning. Whereas Germany was a founding member of the EU, it does not have a target regarding to demonstrate its Europeaness. Thus, representative city Ruhr focuses on the ECoC event just for being a re-branding intermediary. Having spent the energy on this focal point ensures the communicative success of Ruhr 2010.

In conclusion, being a ECoC was a catalyst for cultural regeneration of Pécs and Ruhr. Despite some detuned messages, the event has helped both of the cities to position themselves as new cultural centers of Europe. Comparatively, Ruhr seems to be more successful in giving consistent messages to the audiences via different visual and textual sources.

While this study focuses on the reflections of the city brands via their rhetorical representations, excludes the audience perceptions. For future implications the researchers might consider to analyze both sides of the coin and try to reveal whether the audiences perceive the messages in the intended manner.

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