



Original Article

The politics of meaning and the city brand: The controversy over the branding of Ankara

Received (in revised form): 10th May 2012

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ABSTRACT This article presents analysis of a period of public argumentation over the city logo of Ankara, the capital of Turkey. These arguments comprise a 17-year episode of controversy that reveals insights into the politics of meaning behind city's brand. Ankara's logo functions as a contested 'collective representation' of the city's brand identity, and paved the way to further discussions on its history, cultural identity and politics by various internal stakeholders. The significance of this research is two-fold. First, the Ankara case contributes to existing studies of place branding and semiotics, by examining the contending positions that complicate Ankara's historical identity and the range of stakeholders that make up the 'managerial apparatus' of brand meaning. Drawing on communication studies, 'controversy' provides an analytical vehicle to consider claims to brand ownership, legitimacy and authority by various stakeholders, as well as to demonstrate the potential of public argumentation to transform and shape the practice of place branding.

Place Branding and Public Diplomacy (2012) 8, 133–146. doi:10.1057/pb.2012.8

Keywords: Ankara; logo; controversy; argumentation; semiotics; critical studies

INTRODUCTION

What can a public controversy over a city branding campaign reveal about the social and political dimension of branding? Place branding has been described as a process of collective meaning creation (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 46). It has served as a crucial

practice of symbolic representation for geographically defined identity positions and place characteristics (Griffiths, 1998; Freire, 2005; Warnaby and Medway, 2010). The branding process is thus a *mediation* of a place for those that elect to define and promote such a place. It is

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both a process that yields a product (a brand) and a social process that reflects the contested, critical distribution of power and agency that works to authorize, justify and define a brand.

In this article, we draw upon insights from communication studies to explore how public arguments over the branding of the capital of Turkey, Ankara, reflect an episode of public reasoning, in order to highlight an aspect of branding that is often neglected in branding research. This study illustrates the communicative politics at stake in how brands create meaning on behalf of a public and for an imagined audience. We focus exclusively on an ongoing episode of contention over Ankara's logo. In this case, the controversy revolves around the authority to implement a symbol to represent the city, the legitimacy of meaning behind the symbol and the kinds of deliberative practice that the brand itself came to represent as a form of public reasoning.

The focus on public communication in a branding exercise is warranted by previous place branding scholarship (Freire, 2005; Hatch and Rubin, 2006; Koller, 2008, pp. 431–432; Kaneva, 2011; Van Assche and Lo, 2011). It is evident that the branding process should not be construed as an uncontested reflection on how social or political groups work out what a place means, or why it should be branded in the first place. As Freire (2005) argues, place brands are social constructs, and have very real social and political implications. Therefore, the domestic *processes* of brand formation may be crucial in our understanding of both the critical and practical implications of place branding (Hankinson, 2004; Morgan *et al*, 2004; Sevin, 2011). While some argue that a place brand cannot be reduced to a logo or an emblem (Kavaratzis, 2005; Anholt, 2010; Braun and Zenker, 2010), logos are visual statements that form crucial representational components of place's brand and identity (Floch, 2001). Thus, the contention over Ankara's official logo is discussed here as part of the branding process.

Following Manning's (2010) criticism of branding scholarship, *place branding* studies

have reached a crossroads that highlights the cross-purposes of critical and practice-oriented research. Many have identified the constitutive effects of a global consumerist discourse on branding's popularity as a concept, while more practice-oriented scholars seek a new terrain of promotional possibilities for the linkage between the brand and the space (Jansen, 2008; Koller, 2008; Kaneva, 2011). These positions may never be wholly reconcilable, yet certain assumptions about meaning creation in the branding across both traditions suggest aspects of branding that are less understood. The principal contention of this article is that a critical place branding scholarship relevant to both practical and theoretical concerns may be advanced by a focus on the communicative labor that goes into the formation of the brand. The study presented here examines a bounded period of public argument – claims, counter-claims and rhetorical moves to support or refute – that comprise an episode of controversy over the logo for the city of Ankara. This controversy is argued as revealing for place branding scholarship because it makes the semiotic politics of a place-branding campaign explicit.

There are obvious limitations to this study. Here, we focus on the first stage of Basu and Wang's (2009, pp. 84–86) elements of brand strategy – *brand definition*. Subsequent stages of brand strategy, *brand communication* and *brand management*, deal respectively with the modes of representation in the brand and the institutional capacity to sustain and promote the brand. The point of this exercise is to contextualize the semiotics of place branding and to demonstrate the material consequences of how people argue in public about branding.

This article's argument is developed in three parts. In the next section, we operationalize place branding, and clarify the link between semiotics, controversy and place brands. Subsequently, we outline our case study methodology, highlighting key moments, figures and arguments in the discourse. Finally, we conclude that in order to better understand the place branding process among

brand stakeholders, it is necessary to look at how the signifier–signified relationship is situated within a politicized episode of place branding that works to sustain or transform the semiotic link between ideas and representation in a place brand.

PLACE BRANDING, SEMIOTICS AND CONTROVERSY

‘Place brands’ and ‘place branding’ have been defined with the help of several disciplines such as marketing theories (cf. Kavaratzis, 2005), public relations (Wang, 2006), international relations (van Ham, 2001; Potter, 2009), public diplomacy (Gilboa, 2008; Szondi, 2008), communications (Sevin, 2010; Kaneva and Popescu, 2011; Kaneva, 2011) and geography (Boisen *et al.*, 2011). Much of this literature articulates what place branding is *not*, rather than what it is (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006). We do not claim to finalize the definitional debate. However, we acknowledge our assumptions about this highly debated concept (Sevin, 2011; Boisen, 2012) in order to distinguish the contribution proposed by the present study.

A place brand is a network of associations in people’s minds which are embodied through a place’s assets as well as in communication attempts (Braun and Zenker, 2010) which incorporate internal conception (the meaning of the place for its citizens), exposed identity (the advertised and directly communicated image) and audience perception (the image in the consumers’ minds) (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Anholt, 2010). The subject of analysis in our case study is the politicized relationship between internal conception and exposed identity. By describing the mechanics of this conceptual link between brand identity and brand image (Olins, 2004), we aim to deconstruct the semiotic link between the ideas and the logos, and present the importance of public argumentation in meaning creation for brands.

Understanding place brands in the ‘semiotic society’

The very idea of *branding* rests on some key assumptions about the arbitrary nature of

meaning associated with signs (Chandler, 2007). As Charles Sanders Peirce argued famously, ‘nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign’ (Peirce, 1931, p. 2.172). Semiotic studies are often preoccupied with ways in which a culture or group attributes meaning to signs, or how images, words, sounds and other texts come to mean or signify something in a given context – where the signified are attached to signifiers in relation to other signifier–signified pairings (Chandler, 2007). Semiotics has been a useful framework for place branding scholars because it provides a systemic, conceptual framework through which to understand the linkages between the material signifier and less obvious qualities or traits that brand initiatives seek to invest (Mick, 1986). In this study, however, the focus is on how the creators of the sign (or brand) settle on what codes attribute meaning, and less so on how sign consumers attach meaning to signs.

Manning observes that many definitions of the ‘brand’ seem to make the concept coextensive with the process of ‘semiosis’ – where *everything* is a brand because it carries meanings and associations. Manning cautions that we should not understand brands as some kind of compelling evidence of semiotics, that every label carries meanings and that brands are thus ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (Manning, 2010, p. 35). Even from a critical vantage point, brands are more than ‘a kind of globalized interdiscursivity, an indexical icon of the virtual nature of the global capitalist’ (Manning, 2010, p. 35). Branding may be everywhere, but it is not altogether obvious that branding occludes how stakeholders ascribe meaning or that branding itself is not a socially constructed activity. Building on this insight, a productive move for both critical theory and practical analysis would be to ascertain how brands are invested with a materially significant status – what Hatch and Rubin call the ‘collective interpretations by multiple stakeholders over numerous but particular historical moments’ (Hatch and Rubin, 2006, p. 41).

Providing a fuller understanding of semiotics and the place brand would require an analysis

of both the structures of cognitive associations between the signifier and signified, *and* how brands are incorporated with symbols by collective efforts (Koller, 2008, pp. 434–435). To use the parlance of semiotics, the place brand is not simply a structural effect of relations among signifiers, but also about the diachronic (historical) nature of the sign. This point is underscored by Anholt's arguments about the inertia of nation-brands and the difficulties inherent in public diplomacy (Anholt, 2007). Place brands are not wholly arbitrary, but rely upon a social repertoire of legitimate and credible signifier-signified relations.

A semiotic perspective acknowledges that branding is always happening, whether intentional or not (Anholt, 2007). Brands are, in essence, an institutionalization of collective representation. As Freire observes, 'it can be argued that [...] brand definitions are just a statement of what a brand should be if managed coherently' (Freire, 2005, pp. 349). Place brands are *instrumental* means to shape the already commonplace process of semiotics in social life; brands 'augment' symbolic features that are always already inherited and, at times, contested. Freire argues that the increased significance of place branding is due in part to the pervasiveness of the 'semiotic society' (Freire, 2005, p. 350; cf. Lash and Lury, 2007) that defines the contemporary global condition.

Freire's sociological standpoint provides a key warrant to consider the practice of public argument about brands – where interested parties make contending claims over what symbols should signify and why. Freire's 'semiotic society' invites attention to the reflexivity of place branding. It allows analysts to move from a macro-social critique to the more immediate concerns of how place brands actually get negotiated, contested and circulated.

Indeed, while Gertner's extensive meta-review of place branding scholarship has indicated a pervasive interest in the signifying process between the place and the brand (Gertner, 2011a,b), according to Freire 'there are not

many studies which investigate the rationale of branding places' (Freire, 2005, p. 348). To pose a question in Gertner's (2011a) terms, what comprises a 'managerial apparatus' responsible for a place brand, and how does it resolve the reasoning process behind the place brand?

Branding through social controversy

We argue that the semiotics of *controversy* is instructive for place branding studies in two principal ways. A branding controversy reveals to the practitioner the often arbitrary and contingent nature of a brand's symbolic representation, and can be an instructive guide to how to manage or coordinate a brand's capacity to signify among stakeholders. For the critical branding scholar, analyzing the political assemblage of place brands reveals the points of social tension and compromise often elided in the attempt to signify a place through the politics of the brand.

A focus on controversy reveals contending arguments about signification and communication norms, and allows the analyst to unpack the essentialist claims about how brands reflect the most compelling form of symbolic correspondence between image and material assets. Studying how people argue about brands sidesteps previous studies that either (a) reinforces brands as markers of a dominant global consumer or neo-liberal culture (Jansen, 2008, p. 122) or (b) depicts brands as determined by an 'instrumental' conception of culture that discounts the contingent and often contradictory aspects of local culture that wind up in a brand campaign (Kaneva, 2011, pp. 121–122).

Controversy is described by communication scholar G. Thomas Goodnight (1991, 2003) as *generative*. It reveals taken-for-granted relationships between communication and reasoning, which are open to change, reevaluation and development by argumentative engagement (Goodnight, 1991). As Goodnight and Kathryn Olson state, 'a social controversy is an extended rhetorical engagement that

critiques, resituates, and develops communication practices' (Olson and Goodnight, 1994, p. 249). In a controversy, 'arguers criticize and invent alternatives to established social conventions and sanctioned norms of communication' (Olson and Goodnight, 1994). If place branding is, as we argue, a social process, then examination of a branding controversy illuminates the brokerage of meaning and interests that are often implicated in critical-conceptual treatments of branding (Freire, 2005; Koller, 2008; Warnaby and Medway, 2010). The semiotic linkages between signifier and signified within a brand are not wholly arbitrary – they are arbitrated.

Following Goodnight and Olson's methodology for the study of social controversy, the present study examines three key aspects of the Ankara city branding controversy. First, the main assumptions about the symbols chosen to represent Ankara in its logo campaign are examined. Second, we discuss the factors or issues that make the brand a site of struggle. Third, the 'shape' of the discussion and its consequences in the formation the brand are presented.

This proposed understanding of branding is informed by critical branding scholarship, with some crucial caveats (Jansen, 2008; Koller, 2008; Kaneva, 2011). Such scholars make structural arguments about a globalizing branding 'discourse'. They critique the relations between place, citizenship and consumption that are implicated in branding. We contend, however, that public arguments offer access to how stakeholders resolve the prescriptive practices of representation, and importantly – how collective representation claims can be made, by who, in whose name, and how meaning can be normatively and socially ascribed to the brand.

ONE CITY, MANY LOGOS: THE CASE OF ANKARA

Ankara has witnessed numerous proposals for logos, legal actions, public appeals and a resistance campaign since the city logo first became a contentious issue in 1994. Given our focus on the meaning creation functions

of place branding, and the generative aspects of controversy, the case of Ankara showcases questions over the 'need for branding', 'brand ownership' and most importantly 'the significance of symbols' for the residents. We first present a short background about Ankara and the local administration structure. Next, we look at public deliberation and argumentation in four key time periods of Ankara's contested politics of visual representation.

Background

Ankara is the capital of the Turkish Republic and home to more than four million people. It is the second largest city in the country. Located in central Anatolia, the city has been an important settlement place for several civilizations, including the Lydians, Persians, Romans and Ottomans. The Hittites are the first-known settlers in the province of Ankara. During the Turkish Independence War, following World War I, the National Assembly was established in the city in 1920. After the end of the war, Ankara was declared Turkey's capital and became the permanent host of the Assembly.

The city of Ankara is governed by two main authorities. The Provincial Governor (*Vali*) represents the Turkish central government in a city, and is responsible for implementation and execution of central government orders. The Governor is a civil servant appointed by the central government. The city is also governed by the Municipality Mayor (*Belediye Başkanı*). The Mayor is elected by popular vote. The Mayor's responsibilities include urban infrastructure, transportation, geographical and urban information systems, culture and arts activities, tourism and promotion, and economic and trade development.

Melih Gökçek has served as the Metropolitan Mayor for the Ankara Municipality since 1994 and has won three electoral contests since that time. Gökçek plays a pivotal role throughout the course of the controversy over Ankara's brand logo, where the cultural and ideological dimensions of his political success manifest in the symbolic politics of his logo proposals.

Public disagreement over Ankara's logo began shortly after Gökçek took office. Before 1995, the Hittite Sun was used by the Ankara Municipality both in official businesses and in promotional events. The Hittites are the first-known settlers in the area, and the sun is the symbol for their art, culture and civilization (Özer, 2003). In 1970s, Mayor Vedat Dalokay commissioned a statue of a Hittite artifact, which was placed in *Sihhiye*, a prominent location in the city (Dündar, 2008). The logo derived from the artifact was subsequently used by the three mayors after Dalokay, who were all members of social democratic or center-right parties.¹ Gökçek, in contrast, has been affiliated to the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party, and the Justice and Development Party. All of these parties are known for their conservative/Islamist political views.

In June 1995, Gökçek argued that the Hittite Sun logo (see Figure 1) did not adequately reflect the city's identity and introduced a new logo (see Figure 2) depicting scenery from the city, including the minarets of the *Kocatepe* Mosque and Atakule – two of the city's landmark buildings. This logo was ratified by the Municipality Assembly (Özer, 2003). In July 1995, several non-governmental organizations started to collect signatures in opposition to the new logo and applied to the Governor's office to reinstate the Hittite-inspired logo.

The ensuing opposition to Gökçek's brand image campaign would continue, despite four consecutive elections victories. Gökçek could not accumulate enough popular support to settle the controversy over the logo. The following sections outline the major developments in the controversy. The first period began after Gökçek's proposed logo in 1995. Another wave of discussions is observed in 2000 when Gökçek called for a referendum on the new logo. The re-introduction of the logo in 2005 sparked another period of opposition. Lastly, the most recent episode begins with the introduction of the Angora cat logo in 2010, and the subsequent unveiling of a lightly retouched logo and municipal emblem.



Figure 1: Ankara's logo before 1995.
Source: Image taken from CNNTurk.



Figure 2: Proposed logo in 1995.
Source: Image taken from CNNTurk.

Against the Hittite legacy

During his first year in the office, Gökçek argued that the Hittites could not represent Ankara as there was not enough historical evidence to show that they have settled in the area that is now Ankara (Özer, 2003). Following this claim, the Municipality commissioned a competition for a new logo, which resulted in the winning design that foregrounded the significance of the *Kocatepe* mosque for the city. This

proposal sparked opposition based on two positions. Firstly, various stakeholder groups started to question whether the mayor had the legal and bureaucratic authority to change the logo. Secondly, the symbolic capacity of the new logo to represent the city was called into question.

Rahmi Kumaş, a lawyer and a former member of the Turkish Parliament from Republican People's Party, criticized the Municipality's work on the new logo and argued that changing the city's logo was outside the mayor's jurisdiction (Ankara Haber Ajansı, 2008). He sued Gökçek four days following the Municipality's decision. The Ankara 2nd Administrative Court reached a decision in 2001 in favor of Kumaş, six years after the logo was introduced (Cumhuriyet, 2008). The decision was not argued on the basis of the signifier as being *representative*, but rather on the authority to craft such a sign on behalf of the city. This challenge based on legal right was raised again in 2004, when the government implemented a change in Municipality code to extend the responsibilities of the mayor's office, allowing Gökçek the power to again implement a logo.

Ankara's history, however, remained a significant and contested resource for the interlocutors. When Dalokay first introduced the Hittite Sun as the city's logo (as well as installing a sculpture in the city center) in 1973, members of National Salvation Party – a conservative/Islamist political party and a predecessor of Gökçek's Welfare Party – argued that 'a pre-Islamic civilization cannot be used to represent the capital' (Haber Sol, 2011). The mosque depiction in Gökçek's 'silhouette of the capital' appealed more readily to the conservative parties arguing for a representative image for Ankara (Işık, 2005).

Being a secular democracy with a predominantly Muslim population, the ideological clashes between secular and conservative camps in Turkish public sphere are plentiful (Göle, 1997; Cinar, 2005). Gökçek's proposed logo in 1995, not surprisingly, faced mixed reactions (Özer, 2003). The iconography of the mosque

and the tower – both of which were built within the previous four decades – also appear to implicitly identify the economic power holders within the city. Nevertheless, opposing groups argued that the proposed change was 'ideological' and 'ignored the long history of the city' (Özer, 2003).

This early stage of the controversy made the city's logo an important platform to discuss power and identity issues. Following Freire, a 'branding' campaign can serve as a site for deliberating collective identity. As the controversy unfolded, brand expressions became events around which social positions and legitimacy were resolved – including the relation of governance over symbolic representation of the past.

New actors, new platforms: 2000–2001

The second wave of the controversy began shortly after Gökçek's second term started in 2000. During the following two years, the brand stakeholders sought to expand the venues to argue beyond legal forums, to include non-discursive and political opposition. The first move came from the opposition in the Municipality Assembly, who introduced a motion to question the legitimacy of the logo. The opposition plan was blocked by Gökçek, who sought to resolve the issue through a public referendum. Sedat Vural, an independent lawyer, took the referendum decision to the Ankara 10th Administrative Court. He argued that the Municipality did not have the authority to call for a referendum and won the case (Hürriyet, 2000). In response, Gökçek defended the referendum process as a 'public poll'. But, such a vote never materialized. Far from bringing any conclusion, the logo controversy was sustained by uncertainty over terms of jurisdiction, arguments over democratic participation and the viability of arguments made from historical evidence.

Despite having lost its legal battle, the Municipality approached the state-appointed Governor's office to notarize the new logo in order to use it on city flags. In January 2001,

the Governor's office rejected the application. A Governor-commissioned 'Flag Inspection Council' concluded that the new logo was 'far from symbolizing the capital of modern, contemporary, and secular Turkish state' and the misuse of crescent and star might 'decrease the level of respect to the Turkish flag' (NTVMSNBC, 2001). The council further argued that the logo did not 'express the developments and gains of the republic, such as the Grand National Assembly of Turkey'. Interestingly, the reasoning behind the commission's decision rests on a powerful linkage between the material symbol and the identity that it references.

Symbols, according to the court decision, have a strong constitutive power to represent. Such symbols therefore have ramifications for the social and cultural cohesion of a governed place. Rather than reject the logo on jurisdictional grounds, the report directly criticizes the potential effects of the symbol. Gökçek's symbol can 'break down the historical shared memory of the city', and '... highlight[ed] religious and holy symbols which might construct opportunities to propagate against one of the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic – secularism' (NTVMSNBC, 2001).

The Governor's office based its decision on three separate grounds: (i) the logo did not symbolize Ankara properly as an idealized modern state, (ii) it did not depict the city's historical and cultural richness, and (iii) it was against the Turkish political norm of 'secularism'. The Council – taking its legitimacy solely from bureaucratic regulations with regard to logos and flags – attempted to delineate the boundaries of Ankara's *brand identity* and differed from Gökçek on epistemological, cultural and ideological grounds.

Mayor Gökçek disapproved of the council's decision, and countered that 'the ultimate decision is for *Ankarians* to make' (Hürriyet, 2001a). He used the examples of other cities in Turkey (Istanbul, Kayseri, Erzurum, Şanlıurfa, Tokat and Adapazarı) that had mosques in their logos. Gökçek sought to

reframe the debate as about the rights of governance rather than about representational accuracy. Yet, in April 2001, the court case brought by Kumas back in 1995 concluded that 'the Metropolitan Municipality did not have the authority to change' the logos, and flags (Hürriyet, 2001b). The Municipality was then required to use the Hittite sun logo.

Despite the court decision, Gökçek continued using the mosque-inspired logo despite the council's disapproval without any repercussions. Gökçek's use of the city's logo became a kind of politics by other means, whereby the symbol represented his own claim to authority and a non-discursive vehicle of public argumentation. Gökçek's defiance of the legal system and call for *Ankarians* to decide on the logo would set the stage for subsequent communicative action by opposition groups, which would turn to the logo itself as a means of expressing arguments.

The return of the logo: 2005–2008

The 2004 local elections were a significant turning point for Gökçek's political positioning and ability to set the terms of subsequent debate over the branding of the city. Gökçek ran as the candidate of the newly founded conservative and Islamist *Justice and Development Party (JDP)*. Given the fact that the JDP won Turkey's general elections two years earlier, he had the support of the political party in government. In December 2004, the central government changed the municipal code, and gave the authority to change the city's logo to the municipalities (Ankara Haber Ajansı, 2008). In January 2005, the Municipal Assembly ratified the 1995 logo once again.

In the following month, Rahmi Kumas filed another suit in the Ankara 3rd Administrative Court to oppose the implementation of the logo (Cumhuriyet, 2008), and in April 2008 the court declared that 'the Municipality's defense about the objectives for changing the logo was not persuasive' and that 'changing the logo was not for the public good' (Vatan, 2008). In this decision, the courts did not comment directly on Gökçek's authority so much as the reason for the logo's usage.

The logo – the visual expression of Ankara’s identity – represented a kind of ‘public good’ that would appear to need preservation from the party politics of the municipal government. The Municipality objected to the court’s decision and took it to the Council of State, the highest administrative court in the country. In August 2008, the Council of State stated that the 1995 logo could no longer be used – which prompted a search for a new logo (Akşam, 2009).

During this period the controversy expanded from its origins as a jurisdictional conflict between the Municipality and the courts in three dimensions. First, other stakeholders from the public began to participate in the controversy. The former Mayor Karayalçın argued that the Hittite Sun logo was very popular during his term in office, and Mayor Gökçek’s motives to change the logo were purely political (Eğrikavuk, 2011). The speaker for the opposition in the Municipal Assembly Fazıl Guleken said that the logo proposed by Gökçek ‘is opposed by politics, arts, crafts, and university circles and is not proper for Ankara’. He argued that a logo competition was necessary and ‘it was not proper for the Municipal Assembly to decide on the issue by majority’ (CNNTürk, 2008). Gökçek, in response, reiterated his earlier arguments about the inability of Hittites to depict Ankara given the lack of ‘historical evidence’.

Second, overt discussion about how to ‘rebrand’ Ankara re-surfaced with attention to the representational power of logo images to evoke idealized signs about the city. This was made explicit in the Flag Inspection Council’s report and Gökçek’s argument that the logo should reflect the input of Ankara’s citizens. At stake in the deliberation was the meaning of the ‘the capital of Turkey’ in a historical and cultural context. History again served as a primary site of disagreement.

Ankara’s 3rd Administrative Court’s decision in 2008 stated that Ankara ‘has been influenced by Hittite, Phrygian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman civilizations, and has served an important role during the Turkish

Independence war and the Republican times’ (TMMOB, 2008). Yet the Court’s ruling was not without its detractors. One commenter mockingly suggested that other Turkish cities should also change their logos to depict ‘Byzantine Castles, and Greek Islands’ (Osman, 2008a). Not surprisingly, the non-Turkish and non-Islamic historical symbology named in the Court decision were not welcomed by many groups, including the Gökçek administration (Dündar, 2008).

On the other hand, an opposition member of the Municipal Assembly argued that ‘it is impossible to symbolize five thousand years history of Anatolia via a 30-year old mosque and a tower’ (Işık, 2005). Moreover, the Islamic references were not welcomed by the secular groups as they did not properly reflect the city’s historical significance as the home of the National Assembly during the Independence War (Akşam, 2009). Competing arguments over the composition of historical logos approximated a social and political contest of collective representation, between secular, Turco-Islamic and historical identities of the city.

Lastly a new communication platform emerged during this period of the controversy. In early 2007, an unorganized *de facto* movement started replacing the 1995 logo with the Hittite Sun sticker around the city (Bigumigu, 2007) (Figure 3). ‘The Hittite Sun rises once again over Ankara’ constituted a subversive, symbolic campaign, designed to counter the prevalence of Gökçek’s imposition of the post-Hittite logos that for many appeared politically and ideologically charged. Sharing the sticker design online (Şeyler, 2007), individuals made stickers and replaced the logo on street signs, bus stops, park benches and various other public venues.

Just as the Gökçek administration earlier flouted court and commission rulings against his authority to implement a logo, opposition groups turned to the logo itself as a site of non-discursive argumentation, or resistance through the symbol as a means of expression. The social controversy was no longer simply about the logo – it was sustained by the logo.



Figure 3: Public protest stickers
Source: image taken from CNNTurk.com.

Logo or emblem: 2010 and beyond

After the 1995 logo was rendered unusable by the Council of State in 2008, Gökçek and the metropolitan Municipality shifted its framing strategy. Gökçek's administration stressed the difference between a *logo* and an *emblem*, arguing that the former is used for the city's promotion while the latter is reserved for the exclusive use of official Municipality transactions and service. This distinction became grounds for a new logo and emblem for the city. Yet attempts to diffuse the controversy through this distinction were not successful. By 2010, the now 15-year-old debate had involved various actors, legal code changes, public discourse and creative reactions. The controversy featured contention over jurisdiction and identity, as much as the capacity of an emblem and logo to *represent*. Implicitly, the debate brought the normative dimensions of brand communication to the surface – what can and should stand in as representative of Ankara's identity, history and culture.

In 2010, Gökçek changed representational tactics. Gökçek introduced the Angora cat logo (see Figure 4) to symbolize 'the young and dynamic population of the city through its fonts, and Turkish hospitality through its smile' (İl Gazetesi, 2010). This logo was once again contested in the courts by Rahmi Kumas (Hürriyet, 2011). The Ankara 7th Administrative Court rejected the case. Kumas took the case to the Council of State which, in September 2011, decided the logo cannot be used because it was ratified without a required two-thirds majority. Obeying the court



Figure 4: Ankara's logo, 2010.
Source: Image taken from CNNTurk.com.



Figure 5: Ankara's logo 2011.
Source: Images taken from Municipality website, <http://www.ankara.bel.tr/>.

decision, the Municipal Assembly ratified a slightly modified version of the 2010 logo (see Figure 5) in 2011. As of this writing, the

modified version remains the official logo of Ankara.

However, Gökçek continued to push the 1995 Mosque logo for Ankara's *emblem*. In 2011, he introduced a slightly modified version of the Mosque-inspired logo (Yeni Şafak, 2011). The number of stars on the logo increased from three to five – to symbolize the capitals of five Turkish states that lived in Anatolia (Aktif Haber, 2011). Rahmi Kumas launched a legal case against the emblem, arguing that 'the defendant Municipality does not have the authority to install a new symbol as the *Mosque* and *Atakule* logo had been rule out by the courts' (Son Sayfa, 2011) (Figure 6).

Oppositional arguments based on the composition of both the logo and emblem again resurfaced. Former Mayor Karayalçın, supporting the continuation of the Hittite Sun, said 'rejecting the Hittite symbol is akin to rejecting Ankara's cultural heritage' (Eğrikavuk, 2011). Conservative, religious stakeholders questioned the new logo, arguing that 'a Turkish city that has maintained its existence

in these lands since 1040 cannot be deduced to a cat' (FarkEtmez.net, 2010). Gökçek defended his proposals, arguing that the new emblem perfectly represents Ankara (CNNTürk, 2011) and reiterated that there is no evidence of Hittites living in Ankara (Sabah, 2011). One supporter of Gökçek's logo argued that using the Hittite Sun as a symbol is as non-sensical as using a cross as the city's symbol because of its Byzantine past (Osman, 2008b).

Attempts to differentiate logo and emblem did little to resolve the politics of the brand, but rather opened up opportunities for stakeholders to craft new justifications through legal and social legitimacy claims. Arguments on the basis of political authority and identity remain open to contestation, both through deliberative and non-discursive strategies.

CONCLUSION

Place branding obviously involves more than the creation and management of visual texts such as a logo. As place branding scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated (Gertner, 2011a), branding is about leveraging the capacity of symbols to selectively amplify characteristics, values and resources. Places are not endowed with traits that are unproblematically available to brand promoters. Place brands must mediate the collective cultural, political and social characteristics that define a geographic location *as a place*, before such resources can be rendered as effective rhetorical vehicles intended for external audiences (Adams, 2009; Boisen *et al*, 2011). The investment of meaning remains prominent in the semiotic politics of the brand, but as the case here suggests, such debates also stand in for other kinds of social and political contests.

Debates over Ankara's city logo presented here illustrate the social, political and ideological dimensions of brand construction. The focus on 'controversy' is instructive because it locates the aforementioned 'mediation' as a communication-driven process of competing claims over political authority and historical authenticity. We argue that this kind of analysis complements existing place branding scholarship based on effects, as well as critical scholarship's attention to invasive



Figure 6: Ankara's emblem 2011.
Source: Images taken from Municipality website, <http://www.ankara.bel.tr/>.

global discourses by looking at the substantive effects of public reasoning (Habermas, 2001; Goodnight, 2003; Sevin, 2011).

This case also demonstrates how brands can become proxy sites for significant social deliberation – something that Freire alludes to in his defense of the social value of brands (Freire, 2005). Arguments over the right to determine a brand suggest a contingent and shifting institutional conception of the democratic governance of symbols. The politics of the brand exposes existing tensions and competing norms that sustain the legitimacy of *political* representation (Marsh and Fawcett, 2011).

The logo debates also reveal contentions over what counts as historical and cultural resources that can be translated into a brand. These positions were as much about the normative value and power of symbols as much as a debate over idealized representations of the Turkish national identity project. The debate featured competing claims over images to distill the history of the region into a viable symbolic vehicle for Ankara's civic and cultural identity. These kinds of discussions have broader implications for studies of place branding and public diplomacy that aim to unpack the domestic factors behind the presentation of cultural assets as compelling for external audiences (Fitzpatrick, 2007; van Ham, 2010; Hayden, 2012).

Finally, the Ankara debate re-affirms the general sense among place branding scholarship that place brand stands in for a complex of communication claims. As the scope of the controversy over Ankara's brand extended into non-discursive practices – both 'sides' of the controversy turned to the logo as a means of argumentation and subversion. When Mayor Gökçek was rebuked by the official stance of the Courts, he continued to use the logo as a means of demonstrating political authority. Likewise, opposition groups engaged in a sticker campaign to plaster the old Hittite symbol over Gökçek's city logo. This development supports Freire's claim about the increased relevance of branding – in that the brand became a means of argumentation in civic space as much as a site of political contestation.

Place branding scholarship is inherently a multi-disciplinary endeavor. The case study of Ankara's extended social controversy offers evidence for additional contribution from communication studies to the growing field of place branding. In particular, we advocate further attention to the public communication behind brand definition. Analysis of the political context of brand management can benefit place branding as a field. Such study exposes the institutional and social determinants of branding and provides new avenues for inquiry for both critical and practice-oriented place branding and public diplomacy investigations. The Ankara case is arguably highly contextualized, yet it also conveys the generative capacity of sustained public disagreements to transform and shape the practice of place branding.

NOTE

- 1 Vedat Dalokay (in office 1973–1977) Republican People's Party, Ali Dincer (in office 1977–1980), military rule from 1980 to 1984, Mehmet Altınsoy (in office 1984–1989) Motherland Party, Murat Karayalçın (1989–1993, his deputy Vedat Aydın 1993–1994) Social Democrat's People Party.

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