


## A Review of Places Branding: Identity, Image and Reputation Book

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### ABSTRACT

In 1966, Simon Anholt introduced the concept of national branding, which refers to the branding of places in parallel with the branding of a product or service. However, in the opening lines of his book titled “Branding Places: Identity, Image and Reputation”, which he later published, he stated that this conceptualization was flawed and that it was not possible to brand countries like a product or service. According to Anholt, simple advertising, marketing and public relations practices applied to products and services cannot achieve success when it comes to countries that are not commodities for sale. For this reason, Anholt suggested the conceptualization of “competitive identity” instead of the concept of “country branding”; proposed that countries should focus on strengthening their image, reputation and identity rather than become branding in competition. In line with the main idea expressed, Anholt evaluated the competitive identity from the perspective of image, reputation and identity; detailed the points that countries should consider in order to build a strong competitive identity. With the age of globalization, international relations have gained critical importance, and in this regard, the work serves as a guide for governments, policy makers and academics.

**Keyword:** Image, Country Image, Reputation, Identity.

## Yerlerin Markalaşması Kimlik, İmaj ve İtibar Kitabı Üzerine Bir İnceleme

### Makale Türü

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### ÖZET

Simon Anholt, 1966 yılında bir ürün ya da hizmetin markalaşmasına paralel şekilde yerlerin de markalaşmasını ifade eden ulusal markalaşma kavramını literatüre kazandırmıştır. Ancak daha sonra yayımladığı “Yerlerin Markalaşması Kimlik, İmaj ve İtibar” isimli kitabının hemen ilk satırlarında söz konusu kavramsallaştırmanın hatalı olduğunu, ülkelerin bir ürün ya da hizmet gibi markalaştırılmasının mümkün olmadığını belirtmiştir. Anholt’a göre ürün ve hizmetler için uygulanan basit reklam, pazarlama ve halkla ilişkiler uygulamaları, satılık bir meta olmayan ülkeler söz konusu olduğunda başarı sağlayamamaktadır. Anholt bu nedenle “ülke markalaşması” kavramı yerine “rekabetçi kimlik” kavramsallaştırmasını önermiş; ülkelerin markalaşmak yerine imaj, itibar ve kimliklerini güçlendirmeye odaklanarak rekabette farklılaşabileceğini öne sürmüştür. İfade edilen ana fikir doğrultusunda Anholt, rekabetçi kimliği imaj, itibar ve kimlik perspektifinden değerlendirerek ülkelerin, güçlü bir rekabetçi kimlik inşa edebilmesi için dikkate alması gereken noktaları detaylandırmıştır. Küreselleşme çağı ile uluslararası ilişkilerin kritik bir önem kazanmakta ve bu doğrultuda eser hükümetler, politika yapıcılar ve akademisyenler için bir rehber niteliği taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İmaj, Ülke İmajı, İtibar, Kimlik.

## Yerlerin Markalaşması Kimlik, İmaj ve İtibar, Simon Anholt, 2011, Brandage & İstanbul Ticaret Odası, İstanbul, 171 syf.

The author, who introduced the concept of “national branding” to the literature in 1996, states that the concept of branding can be dangerous when applied to countries, places and regions. According to the author, the concept of “branding” causes a misinterpretation because it is associated with concepts such as marketing and advertising that are evaluated from a negative perspective (Anholt, 2005). Branding, whether for large or small places, evokes superficial marketing methods in promotional activities. So much so that the author describes this misconception as a betrayal to nations and their people. Although Anholt regrets using the conceptualization of nation branding, he also states that it is a good simile for global competition. According to him, destinations just like products, services, and ideas, compete with each other in order to strive position themselves strongly in the global market. The reason for this is that citizens of countries with a positive reputation can more easily access their demands in the global arena. Countries whose image is perceived positively by other nations can realize their commercial, social, cultural and political expectations, as they create the same level of respect and trust.

According to Anholt, a country can enhance its reputation and level of development through its brands. However, it is not possible to brand a country, city or specific region like a product or service. Because there is no research showing that any marketing practices can change the attitude towards a country. On the contrary, the author claims that although many countries spending heavily on advertising and public relations activities, their brand values have not change, in some cases, they have even decrease (Anholt, 2011, p. 14).

According to the author, who describes the branding of nations as a collection of unfair and outdated ideas that threaten the position of countries on the global level, countries are fighting against these expressed ideas. Therefore, governments should promote their own historical, cultural, sociological and natural heritage and diversity to the international community.

Stating that nation (or city, region) branding is not possible, Anholt says that if it were possible, the positive reputations that countries gain and the economic, political and sociocultural successes that come with paralleling this would be limited to high-budget public relations and advertising agencies. In connection with this idea, the author seeks an answer to the following question: If marketing communication can bring success for products and

services, why can't it bring success when it comes to countries and specific countries?

According to the author, the answer to this question lies in the fact that strong brand positioning is not achieved solely through marketing communications. According to him, although commercial brands become permanent in the minds of the masses through corporate communication elements such as logos and slogans and advertising campaigns, their strenght is rooted in the feeling of trust they create. Just as an advertising campaign containing the message “please buy this product” from a brand that has no sense of trust behind would not be successful, delivering the message “please change your thoughts about this country” to regions that do not create a positive perception among the masses is can nothing more than an example of unsuccessful propaganda work. This is because countries, cities and regions should not be considered as commodities for sale (Anholt, 2011, p. 17).

Another point that Anholt emphasizes about the difference between country branding and marketing communication activities implemented for a product or service is that brand owners can have full control over the product or service they produce, whereas such control is not possible for countries. Trademark owners have a guiding influence on the communicative process and consumer experience through which the product or service they produce will be delivered to the masses. However, there is no control mechanism, whether political or not, private or corporate, that directs how countries are understood by other nations.

Anholt states that it is very difficult to change the images we have of countries, cities and regions. One of the reasons for this is that people do not have to think too much about countries, cities and regions in their daily lives. Today, someone living in Morocco thinks about Norway only a few times a year. Ideas about a place that is not thought about intensively are thus perpetuated. Another reason is that perceptions about countries are shaped by their culture. For example, the characterization of Germany today as a disciplined society is a judgment based on its culture. For this reason, it is not possible for a perception formed on the basis of culture to change easily.

Although changing the perception of a nation in the eyes of other countries with a target audience of millions is considered to be quite difficult, Anholt argues that there are three points that countries should focus on in order to build a strong reputation. The first one is to analyze the current perception in the international arena through scientific analysis methods. The second is a collaboration between business and civil society to promote who the nation is, its goals and how these goals can be achieved.

Finally, governments should support innovative breakthroughs in every sector by providing opportunities and facilities. A strong reputation built through these steps enables the construction of a strong identity for nations and destinations (Anholt, 2011, p. 18-19).

Governments have a duty to maintain or strengthen the reputation of nations, especially given that we are in an era of globalization. When the reputation of nations is left to its own fate, it brings with it devastating consequences. A country's reputation that cannot be controlled by governments cannot only be an obstacle to its nation's ability to benefit from many economic, political, social and cultural opportunities, but can also lead to sanctions. For all these reasons, governments need to invest in the promotion of their own nations as much as they do in brands.

The book consists of twelve chapters, with Simon Anholt summarizing his main views on places and their reputation in the introduction. The first chapter (p. 21-30) is titled "Images of Places: Is It About Marketing or Not?". In this chapter, Anholt proposes the conceptualization of "competitive identity" instead of the concept of "branding" for places and argues that the branding of places is about politics rather than marketing communication. A strong image of a place cannot be created or reinvented through marketing communication practices. A strong image of places can only be gained by countries. However, a strong image for countries cannot be achieved through policies alone. Because, although there are many countries with strong policies, they can be characterized by negative perceptions. Changing prejudices is a difficult process. In the relevant chapter of the book, the author reveals that in addition to good policies, the concept consisting of the steps of "content + strategy + symbolic action" must also be built strongly for a strong national image. The strategy involves analyzing a nation's current perception of other nations, where they want to be and what can be done to get there. The content step defines the implementation of the strategy in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres. Symbolic behavior represents a remarkable, memorable, surprising and newsworthy initiative or policy. This pillar, combined with strong policies, is an important factor in building a strong image of a nation in the international arena, but all steps need to be designed in a coherent and sustainable manner. Anholt concludes the last paragraphs of the chapter by stating that countries need to market themselves just like products and services, but that this process is not similar to the process of marketing products and services. The point where marketing of places is like product and service marketing is that in both cases, the product presented must be of high quality. No matter how strong the marketing communication is, if

the product is not of high quality, the result cannot go beyond failure.

The second chapter of the book (p. 31-40) is titled "On Image and Trust" and states that the characteristic feature of every competitive identity that is considered strong is that it has gained the trust of the masses. Masses prefer to shop from brands they know, recognize and trust, or, if they have never experienced the brand before, they prefer to act on their pre-existing sense of trust in the brand. The same bet applies to places. If the country's image is positive, members of that country will have an advantageous experience, while if it is negative, they will have the opposite experience. In this chapter, Anholt points out that within a country there may be groups of people from different nationalities and cultures, and that this is an important factor in the branding action. Using the example of Catalans living in Spain, the author states that countries can also be branded based on their cultural characteristics. The perceptions of non-Muslims towards Muslims and Muslims towards non-Muslims are the result of this kind of branding. Such branding also leads to the damage of international relations politically, economically and socially in the international arena.

The third chapter of the book (p. 41-47), titled "National Identity: Cause or Effect?" questions whether the focus should be on causes or effects to change national reputation. According to Anholt, to change beliefs, the emotions that cause these beliefs need to be changed. In the policy perspective of competitive identity, it is essential for countries to prove their vision for change. For this, the vision of the country should be reflected in the most accurate way through cooperation with the public and private sectors. This vision that countries will adopt should be positioned to differentiate themselves from others, just like the marketing of a product or service. This differentiation should be shaped by the cultural, historical, geographical and social strengths of countries. Again, countries that want to renew their international reputation with a definitive change need the support of their people. That is why governments need to understand the societies of the nation's whose support they want to win.

In the fourth chapter (p. 49-57), titled "Should Places Have Simple Images", the book argues that the main idea is that trademarks adopt a simple, sharp and distinctive positioning strategy, but that this cannot be the case for places. The cultural, political and many other values of countries cannot be reflected in a one-dimensional image strategy. Simplified images cause countries to reduced their attractiveness. Therefore, the images of countries (regions and cities) must have a multidimensional structure that will encompass and support these expressed values. However, the

multidimensional image strategy of countries does not mean that all their characteristics should be covered. The common denominator where all the points reflecting the country meet should be a summary that will ensure that the country is remembered. According to Simon Anholt, a simplified image strategy only temporarily gains the attention of audiences that are not initially aware of the country. For a long-term country branding, dialogues should be built on this temporary ground to ensure the permanence of country relations. According to the author, for all these reasons, country branding in line with marketing strategies is impossible. Marketing strategies can be effective in trying to attract potential customers to a product/service; however, they are not effective in gaining audiences that are not aware of or interested in something that is not for sale. According to Anholt, the question that governments that want to brand their countries should ask is not “what should we do to make our country famous” but “what should we do to make our country meaningful?” Governments should use the media and communication channels to communicate messages that are open, honest and include tangible outcomes, rather than to paint or mask negative attributes. Of course, it is not enough to communicate this vision through media messages; countries also need to support this vision behaviorally. In this way, Anholt argues that the image of places is formed within the framework of the “identity-behavior-image” model. According to him, identity determines how to behave and behavior determines how to be perceived, that is, the image.

In the fifth chapter of the book (p. 59- 91), titled “On National Image and Identity”, the author details the image and identity strategies of countries from all over the world, such as Pakistan, Mexico, Denmark, Italy, Israel, and Latvia. For example, Switzerland should be able to protect and manage its natural assets on a global scale; Albania should take steps to make the world recognize and wonder about it; Dubai should recognize the importance of symbolic values rather than fancy buildings. It is supported by research that Muslim countries are ready to cooperate with the United States, which has a very high branding, in areas that can affect their lives (investment, export, tourism, culture, etc.). According to the author, who shares his anecdotes about the image of places by giving country-specific examples, creating a positive national image is not a project that countries should take into consideration. Creating a positive national image is the only way for countries to be better governed.

The sixth chapter of the book (p. 93-101), “When Does Marketing Make Sense,” discusses a similar problem to the previous chapters. In this chapter, it is emphasized that each promotional action should not be seen as a result alone in enhancing the country’s image, but rather as a step that will strengthen the

reputation and image. A touristic promotional activity is very important on its own; it allows the masses to be curious about the destination, to have an experience of the region. When each person who has had an experience tells others about his/her experience, his/her perception of the country spreads to other groups. Such an impact is also reflected in the country’s image in the long term. However, touristic promotion alone is not enough to reflect or improve the overall image of a country. Marketing activities are meaningful when it comes to the sale of a country’s tourist destinations and other products and services; however, traditional marketing methods cannot be considered a meaningful choice when it comes to the promotion of a country’s image, culture, policies and values.

The importance of public diplomacy becomes more evident when it comes to relations between countries. In the seventh chapter of the book (p. 103-109), “Public Diplomacy and the Branding of Places: What is the Relationship Between Them”, Anholt explains the relationship between the concepts. The author’s first thought on this issue is that public diplomacy is a component of country branding. Accordingly, while public diplomacy represents a single dimension of international relations, country branding aims to unite all aspects of a country such as culture, arts, sports, trade, politics. However, the author later changed his opinion on this issue and evaluated public diplomacy as one of the main factors in achieving the goals of countries together with image (Karadağ, 2022). According to Anholt, successful public diplomacy requires the active participation of national stakeholders as well as policy powers is required. The wide reach of the Internet and media is also an essential factor for successful public diplomacy (Nye, 2023: 159) and country branding.

The eighth chapter of the book (p. 111-123), which evaluates the branding of Europe, is entitled “Europe as a Brand: What Next?” In this chapter, the author presents the findings of the research that aims to reveal the perceptions of European countries. The research covers 26,500 participants from 35 countries and includes the evaluation of European countries in terms of brand dimensions (export, management, culture/heritage, people/people, tourism and investment/immigration). According to the research results, the European brand as an institution cannot surpass the European brand as a continent; the perception of the masses cannot clearly reveal the distinction between European countries and countries that are members of the European Union. However, in the eyes of these masses, Europe is also considered as an important part of the world economy and the region where the most desired cultural, historical and geographical values are located. According to Anholt, the reason why Europe stands out as a geographical

region rather than its corporate branding is that the region has not been able to establish an identity with a strong and common goal. Each EU member state has components of soft power in their own right, but Europe as a whole is perceived as weaker than the combination of the particulars. In order to create European branding with the mentioned qualities, it is essential to go for a structure that combines the soft power components that are gaining strength in particulars.

The ninth chapter of the resource (p. 125-131), titled “Public Sector, Private Sector”, reveals the points where governments and private sectors are similar and different from each other. Both governments and the private sector aim to attract the same target audience and compete fiercely in the same way. However, the private sector has the opportunity to specialize in a single or relatively narrow topic, but the same is not true for governments. It is essential for governments to make generalizations on each issue. Moreover, governments often need to consult experts on every issue they must address. Such a functioning will negatively affect the accurate and fast decision-making process and will cause a decrease in productivity. According to Anholt, what governments need to do to benefit from the advantages that the private sector has is to create hybrid cultures within themselves. He exemplifies this with the “KDLab” (Public Diplomacy Lab), which he co-founded with his colleague. The institution, which operates independently of the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, includes creatives, journalists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and experts from many disciplines, with the aim of developing common, peaceful and innovative ideas on the axis of public diplomacy. According to Anholt, such structures are the only way to move away from traditional media communication and make progress in international relations.

In the tenth chapter of the book (p. 133-151), under the title “Media and National Image”, the relationship between country promotion and media is discussed. In this chapter, Anholt characterizes the media as a medium of black propaganda where paid publicity, realistic information and interpretation are indistinguishable, and no message can be trusted because the original sponsors of the messages remain hidden, but he adds that it should not be abandoned altogether. According to him, in today’s internet age, the media is an important channel for countries to build their image. Media channels alone cannot be considered a critical element for building a better reputation; however, if used correctly, they can be considered as an ally with positive and powerful effects in image development. Anholt argues that a National Media Center should be established to address the negative effects that media can have on

countries. The Media Center is an important institution to ensure consistency in the messaging in publications about the current country. In addition, it directly contributes to the development of the country’s image in matters such as measuring the country’s image in the world public opinion, taking precautions for possible crises and producing solutions for existing crises with the Crisis Management Unit it will host. Another idea in this chapter of the book is that countries with bad stories about them should continue their communication by creating new dialogues with other countries, without getting stuck on the incident in question. According to the author, stories about countries are doomed to be forgotten after a certain period of time. At this point, countries should try to enrich the country’s image with open and honest targets in cooperation with the public and private sectors.

The eleventh chapter of the source (p. 153-164), “What Does All This Have to Do with Me? The Vital Importance of Context”, emphasizes the importance of thoroughly analyzing existing perceptions of a country. With the metaphor used by the author, the images of countries are not a blank canvas on which one can draw arbitrarily. Like a painted canvas, the images of countries are based on a certain infrastructure and stereotyped beliefs. It is futile to expect such a grounded perception to change with an extraordinary method like a magic bullet. Building a strong image of a country is only possible with a clear, sustainable and honest national policy and activities consistent with this strategy (Soysal, 1976).

In the last chapter of the book (p. 165-168), the author presents important anecdotes on the subject under the title “Some Conclusions”. According to the author’s thoughts in the relevant chapter, the image of the nation also has an important effect on personal reputation, and one of the main points that individuals refer to when defining their own identities is national qualities. So much so that this effect is not limited to individuals proving their own identities; it also applies to the relations they establish with other countries. In international relations, which cover many areas such as education, travel and investment, every experience of an individual affects the country’s reputation, and every perception about the country affects and transforms the individual’s experience.

Anholt’s book, which explores the concept of country branding in all its dimensions, serves as a guide for diplomats and governments in the age of globalization when international relations are of critical importance. As Anholt explains, countries that want to have a say in international affairs cannot achieve this success by relying on marketing strategies for a product or service. Countries that want to build a strong country image should accurately analyze their current situation

and direct their resources to the outputs required by this analysis. It is important to note that building a country's image is not only possible through diplomatic activities between the political branches. It is possible to build a country's image by involving publics as well as state actors in the process.

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Ethics committee approval was not sought in this study because it was not a clinical or experimental study on humans or animals that required an ethics committee decision.