



Cultural Urban Branding as an Approach Towards Sustainability

A case study of Madinah, KSA

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Abstract

City branding has become one of the primary policies for achieving sustainability in many countries. In this manner, many strategies can be applied to create place and city urban branding. One of these strategies is the culture-based urban branding. Culture plays a significant role in place and city urban branding; cultural branding can be considered an essential approach for the economic, social and environmental renewal of cities.

City branding has become gradually important according to its bases and activities in the urban development process in general. This paper describes how culture can be used in city branding. The research applies the significance of urban cultural branding to analyse the case study of Madinah, Saudi Arabia.

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Keywords

Cultural urban branding; sustainability; urban design; Madinah; KSA

1. Introduction

Urban brand-image planning policies have become critical for cities that want to be considered in the global economy. Such branding often confirms the unique features of a city's culture and creativity and promotes desirable urban images. The aim of this study is to explain the key aspects of the relationship between culture and urban branding by exploring how culture impacts the forming of a city's urban brand image.

2. The research problem

Nonphysical factors should be linked to visual imagery to present a strong city image as they affect urban image, which can play a significant role in urban branding process. This study seeks to answer the following question:

How can culture affect urban branding?

To answer this question, there is a need for more logical representations of culture in the frame of urban development and design. Accordingly, this study will deal mainly with urban cultural branding and related urban design

applications.

3. Research methodology

This research examines the concept of urban cultural branding on a theoretical, analytical and practical level. It identifies the essential features of an urban branding strategy and connects this with culture-based development. Then the study examines the relation between cultural and urban branding using the example of Madinah (Al Madinah Al Munawara), Saudi Arabia (KSA).

4. Research objectives

The objective of this study is to emphasise the importance of urban cultural branding to urban development and achieving sustainability as a tool for promoting a strong city urban image and related economic values.

5. Cultural urban branding as an approach to sustainability

5.1. City branding definition

In a paper titled 'Branding the city through culture' (2012), Ayşe defined the process of branding a place or city by using the city's entertainment and culture capabilities as one of the motivating and progressively growing directions for achieving sustainable urban design due to their growing significance within the contemporary economy [1]. City branding, according to Gotham (2007), is a process of variation and segregation using arts and cultural facilities, museums, local tourism organisations, heritage-preservation groups and place images that can help to attract consumers and investors [2]. Accordingly, city branding can be defined as the practice of improving a strategy that emphasises the value the place.

As Braun et al. (2014) mention in their book, linked place branding with the target market. Place branding, according to their definition, is 'a network of organisations in the aim place' minds that depends on all levels the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of a place and its residents. It, therefore, tries to affect the understanding of a place and position it favourably in the minds of the visitors' [3].

Place branding, according to the Place Brand Observer, is also 'about influencing people's perception, the image they hold of a particular place, be it a city, region, country or tourist destination. ... In particular, the sustainable competitive feature can be created by building brand equity about the identity of the place' [4]. It is also 'about bridging gaps between the identity or sense of place; its product offering; the experience that visitors (tourists, expats, potential investors and traders) get when they visit; and the image that people have of a place' [4].

From another point of view, Gelder claimed that city brand is about the value that needs to be preserved. He also claimed that value in the process of urban branding is created, developed and confirmed through several tools, such as investments, economic and physical strategies, planned events and cuteness programmes [5].

5.2. The importance of place branding

The most common reason identified by researchers to apply place or urban branding is to promote economic issues. However, there are many other reasons for establishing a brand place or urban strategy. Some of these reasons, according to 'CEOs for cities,' (2006) [6] include:

- Transforming a poor urban image into a strong image depending on increasing awareness.
- Developing future visions for community development.
- Forming a strong representation for a city.

- Promoting a competitive position at local, regional and global levels.
- Reshaping the attraction capabilities of a place.

5.3. The role of culture in city branding

Culture is essential to a city's identity. It directly reflects the reshaping of the city's architecture and urban environment [1]. According to 'CEOs for cities,' (2006) culture is the main resource in building a city's image. Culture is defined, in this manner, like all forms of cultural resources, events, architecture and urban history. Therefore, planners who benefit from the positive images of a city brand, use these cultural resources as the main tool to create the city's urban image [6].

Zhuanqing (2010) supports the same idea. He claims that culture is crucial to branding a city image. He also claims that the attraction and competitive ability of any city depend mainly on improving its quality of culture and cultural facilities [7]. Therefore, we can define cultural life as a major requirement of city branding. This is why culture has recently become the main tool of city branding [8]. This also explains the dependence of a city's brand on the city's identity, and how is this affected by the relationship between culture and city branding (mainly from the dependence of the city's urban image on the city's cultural past and present) [8]. Zukin (2004) claims, in another study, that culture exists in the urban environment as theatres, museums, palaces, parks and marketplaces [9]. Supporting this idea, Kavaratzis (2015) claimed that 'the link between culture and place branding does not stop at the influence of culture on place branding but includes the reverse. Place brands are cultural facts in the sense that they establish one of the practices that create and spread meanings. So that, place branding also supports the place's cultures' [10].

Recently, according to Griffiths (2006), with reference to the concept 'cities should benefit from of culture in branding,' many cities have focused on their culture as a favoured way of achieving a competitive environment. All over the world, cities are developing policies to use their cultural properties to help strengthen their regional identity, to create investment and to attract visitors [11].

The connection between urban branding and culture is defined as a 'continuing repetition between participating to culture and drawing from it.' It is, therefore, important that modern urban brands be presented not as cultural plans but as cultural resources for people to use. Place brands are useful if they are presented as requirements for people to create their place's culture. Within this process, people can discover the spirit of the place [10].

The connection between urban branding and culture is defined as 'a continuing repetition between participating to culture and related drawing from it' [9]. Therefore, according to Zukin (2004), it is essential that modern urban brands be proposed as cultural resources for people to use and not as cultural plans. Because urban brands are useful if they are presented as requirements for people to create their place's culture, the place branding mission has changed to offer drives that people will use to build their place's brand and find their place's spirit [9]. Kunzmann (2004) stated that a city's culture and identity have a supportive relationship. He claims that local identity has become the leading part of the place-making process, and that cultural content remains the main part of local identity [12].

Therefore, there is no doubt that the future of cities will be connected to their culture and local identity. This has been confirmed by recent developments of most urban spaces and the global branding of cities that depend on culture-based strategies [13]. It has become a fundamental resource for place-making and connects physical properties and the living culture. Using this approach, many well-known cities created their new regeneration urban development using urban cultural branding and heritage, and by transforming their economy of landmarks, concepts and icons. Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the UAE are examples.

It can be concluded that urban branding depends on cultural plans. In this case, urban branding tries to re-imagine a city identity that has been broken by the structural changes of the late twentieth century. As mentioned above and according to Rehan (2014), culture should be incorporated into city branding by integrating branding strategies that cover different levels (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Branding strategy (Rehan,2014, pgs. 222-230)

5.4. Principles of place branding

There are many principles of place branding: [4]

1) Speciality

The identity of the place should be respected. This is, what supports the place when it is compared to other places is a main source in the branding process.

2) Originality

A community's soul is the main source for ensuring the originality of solutions when place brand is established. In general, communities should be able to participate in urban branding strategies or application plans.

3) Memorable

The characteristic sense of a place affects the ability of cities to be memorable. Therefore, the experience of a certain place being exciting makes it memorable.

4) Co-creation

Urban branding is a unique process. It is not a top-down process; however, it should be constructed and sustained through a strong arrangement between the government, businesses, residents and target markets (including investors, expats, travel trade and the press) to produce the most significant development outcomes.

5) Place-making

Place-making is connected to integrative place branding strategies, and it is required to capture people's attention. As a result, place branding should be reinforced by many improvements, events, structures, symbolic activities and investments.

5.5. The process of developing a place brand

Many studies on urban branding refer to the steps needed to develop a place brand [6]:

- STEP 1. Determine obvious missions and objectives. Formulate development goals (vision, mission, objectives).
- STEP 2. Identify current brand image (perceived identity and image as well as projected image).

- STEP 3. Set the aspirational brand identity. Design place brand essence using the brand identity and the concept.
- STEP 4. Develop the positioning. Implement the new place brand by performing the brand strategy.
- STEP 5. Measure success by monitoring the place brand.

6. Case study of Madinah, Saudi Arabia

Madinah (Al Madinah Al Munawrah) is the first capital in the history of Islam and the second holiest city in the Islamic world (after the city of Makkah). It has a long history, founded around 1600 years before the arrival of the prophet Muhammed to Madinah. It is located in western Saudi Arabia, about 340 km north of the city of Makkah in Al-Hejaz region. The city is home to the prophet Muhammad's mosque. In total, it contains the oldest three mosques in Islam: Al-Masjid an-Nabaw (the Prophet's mosque), Quba Mosque (the first mosque in Islam's history), and Masjid al-Qiblatain [14]. Therefore, it is one of the top destinations for all visitors to the KSA.

6.1. Cultural urban branding of Madinah

It is difficult to discuss Madinah from an urban branding point of view. The city itself is a well-known brand due to its religious features. Regarding urban development, the city receives governmental support for its role in accommodating a vast number of visitors, which increases yearly. It is estimated to reach 12 million visitors per year by 2040. In 2017, the city was chosen as the capital of Islamic tourism. In 2013, it was selected as the capital of Islamic culture. The city has impressive urban development rates, particularly regarding religious tourism.

Recently, according to many factors and the updated national development vision 2030, a new direction to develop the city's urban image in a way that serves the holy role of the city and offers an excellent modern live experience for the citizen's visitors of the city have been developed. The development strategies associated with new development plans are varied and cover all sectors and life dimension in the city. They include development for both physical and nonphysical aspects (e.g. architecture, urban development, heritage, activities and cultural activities). The redevelopment for city urban image will lead to sustaining the city brand image. One of the key elements of Madinah's urban branding is the link between the culture and the planned urban brand image

In the next points and according to the steps mentioned in section 5.5, this research analyses of the case of Al Madinah.

6.1.1. Objectives

In 2018, the city of Madinah announced the main objective of its city development would be to 'humanise' the city. It is a substantial initiative to strengthen the human dimension. It aims to rebuild and sustain the urban environment of the city according to high standards, inspired by the city's heritage and its holy brand image) [15]. This will be achieved by

- Building an environment that respects Madinah's culture and natural environment.
- Designing an urban cultural brand by conserving historic resources that are landmarks and contribute to the city's identity.
- Improving the quality of life through safe and sustainable public places.
- Strengthening the visibility, image and identity of Madinah.
- Creating meeting places for social interaction.

6.1.2. Identify the current brand image

As mentioned above, the city of Madinah already has a strong brand because of its religious role in Islamic society. This affects the image of the city at all levels. Figure 2 and Figure 3 summarise the elements of the current brand

image.

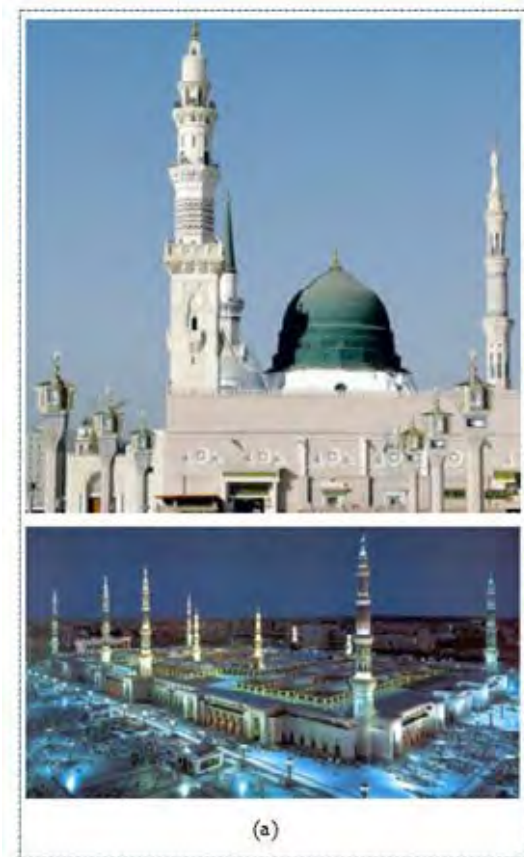


Figure 2. (a) Madinah original branding urban image



Figure 3. (b) Related media-generated logos

Sources: <https://twitter.com/almadina> , <http://almadinahtourism.sa> , https://twitter.com/madina_made, Medina Knowl-

edge Economic City webpage, <https://www.mile.org> , [/https://www.eyeofriyadh.com/events/details/madinah-investment-forum](https://www.eyeofriyadh.com/events/details/madinah-investment-forum), http://www.aleqt.com/2012/02/28/article_631185.html: Madinah brand image concerning the “Place Branding Principles.”

6.1.3. Set the aspirational brand identity

Though the strong religious brand image of Madinah, the Madinah Development Authority in its report on the ‘humanising the city’ initiative, has developed several plans to sustain new dimensions for the brand image of the city through an integrated strategy. This strategy includes the following principal development axes:

- Linking culture, city identity, and human environmental factors as the primary inputs of all development plans for any activity.
- Building human capacity in the urban renewal process.
- Involving citizens in development plans.
- Promoting the city identity through an integrated preservation strategy that includes all of the city, not just the central district.
- Developing new media-based projects, activities, and city life.
- Developing new signature architecture plans.
- Rebuilding a robust and sustainable public transportation system.

Through these development axes, the city of Al Madinah will achieve the following:

- Strengthen the existing brand image of the city, depending on its culture and identity.
- Strengthen the economic infrastructure network through a set of new cultural-based services and activities.
- Strengthen the comfortability and happiness of citizens.

The city of Al Madinah is applying the strategies noted above, recognising the importance of public participation, as branding is not merely an economic activity, but a socio-cultural sense-based process.

6.1.4. Develop the positioning

The city of Madinah is applying the strategies noted above, recognising the importance of public participation, as branding is not merely an economic activity, but a socio-cultural sense-based process. This can be classified into three categories: new reservation and development projects for physical and nonphysical city heritage, new signature urban and architectural projects, and infrastructure development projects.

a) New reservation and development projects for physical and nonphysical city heritage.

This includes a cultural triangle: man, place and activity. At the first level, man, the city of Madinah is promoting participatory culture in all its development plans, including the planning and implementation of development projects. This is increasing the relation between the community culture and the identity of the achieved development.

At the second level, regarding development the place, integrated development plans cover the development of the central district of Madinah (which forms the original city brand image) and the development of other valuable sites to build a network of attractive tourist destinations, transforming them into man- and the environment-friendly sites.

At the third level, regarding activities, there is a desire in the country and Madinah to sustain the role of the socio-culture activities in order to create a healthy society. In the case of Madinah, the side of activity is fulfilled and covers a wide range of events that were designed to happiness, as described by Madinah Development Authority (MDA) (2018). These activities cover cultural, social, sports, and professional activities, in addition to the regular

events developed by the MDA and city to involve all the city citizens in the process of city development.

b) *New signature urban and architectural projects*

New signature urban and architectural projects are being designed, and many have been implemented. These projects will offer new socio-cultural services and include the establishment of a new museum, redevelopment of some existing museums and creation of a new mega welcoming centre near Madinah airport.

c) *Infrastructure development projects.*

One of the key goals of the city development strategy was to improve the road and transportations networks. The city is visited by millions of visitors annually, and this number is increasing. Recent development plans in this sector aimed to create man- and the environment-friendly road and transportations networks that can support the role of the city (as the main destination for Muslims from around the world). Plans also aimed to transform movement inside the city into a journey into its culture. Projects to achieve these goals are under development.

6.1.5. Monitor the place brand

Regarding the principles of place branding, the case of the city of Madinah can be considered of how the culture affects the brand image of a city. Table 1 summarises the principles of place branding.

Table 1. Madinah brand image concerning the “Place Branding Principles.”

Place Branding Principles		Madinah: Application Examples
Speciality	The identity of the place should be respected.	Figure 4
Originality	A community’s soul is the main source for ensuring the uniqueness of solutions when establishing place brand.	Figure 5
Eminence	The original sense of place affects the memorability of the city.	Figure 6
Co-creation	Urban branding is a unique process. It should be constructed and sustained through an arrangement between the government, businesses, residents and target markets.	Figure 7
Place-making	Place-making is connected to an integrative place branding strategy and is needed to captivate the attention of people.	Figure 8

Source: Researcher. Photos: MDA, 2008, and <http://www.alriyadh.com/1684423>



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

6.2. Cultural and urban branding strategies in Madinah

‘Humanising the city to live and visit’: this is the vision for Madinah’s redevelopment. Many branding sub-strategies have been developed to achieve this vision, considering that the city culture and identity is and will remain a baseline that cannot be neglected. According to city authority and the citizens, culture and identity make up the soul of the city. This is evident in all the development strategies. The effect of the city culture and identity is evident in the major features of the city that have been branded: these include urban projects, city-life activities, events, cultural activities and architectural features.

6.2.1. Branding of urban projects

New redevelopment and urban preservation of projects have focused mainly on reflecting the features of the original city culture. At the level of the urban form and architecture design details, the importance of privacy, traditional urban context and fabric, is a major factor. Urban image is strongly affected by city traditions. For example, the use of calligraphy, which is a traditional art. Urban image also reflects the identity of the city in the development of new districts, which use modern Islamic shapes and details. The Medina Knowledge Economic City is an example.



Figure 9. a) Preservation and development urban projects (Ref.:MDA. 2018) b)Medina Knowledge Economic City (Ref.: Medina Knowledge Economic City webpage)

6.2.2. Branding of city life

Because culture affects urban development, it is the main theme in the branding of city life through various events and activities. This process supports the city's urban image, and it helps to render the urban image into active urban life. Many local, regional and international events and festivals take place in Madinah alongside religious activities, according to the spiritual role of the city.



Figure 10. Branding of city life, cultural activities, Madinah Ref.:MDA. 2018 and <http://almadinahtourism.sa>

6.2.3. Historical buildings

The promotion of Madinah as a city with cultural development is a continuous feature of the city's history as part of its religious role in Islamic society. The central district that contains the Prophet's mosque is under continual development. However, the current development activities aim to introduce the entire city as a complete culture-

based brand image that includes many details of its historical places and buildings. In this realm, redevelopment under the ‘humanising the city’ urban development plan is being applied. Through this programme, all component of historic buildings will be redeveloped with an urban-based approach to development. This approach ensures not only preservation but the provision of a sustainable solid economic base depending on the strength of the developed urban context.



Figure 11. Historical buildings and sites examples, Madinah Source: <http://almadinahtourism.sa>

6.2.4. Signature architecture

Madinah has many significant architectural works, including the mosque of the prophet Muhammad. One of the main futures of the mosque is the continuous improvement process, which does not affect the image of the mosque’s original structure. As a result, the mosque and its surrounding urban area have a dynamic urban image.

On the other side, the city plans to add new landmarks architecture works, which will be designed to fit the city brand image: Madinah as a cultural centre of the Islamic world. These works will include new international cultural facilities, such as new museums and touristic services.



Figure 12. a) Prophet’s Mosque expansion, b) Proposed Madinah Welcoming Center, c) Madinah’s new railway station

Sources: news.travelerpedia.net, <http://www.raka-design.net/project-locations/al-madinah/>

<http://www.saudiprojects.net/>

6.2.5. Media-generated image

Because of the essential religious role of the city, the Madinah's religious brand urban image is featured in advertising campaigns, TV reports, movies, documentaries, city publications and on many websites. However, there are no official web pages featuring socio-cultural activities and events or offer the needed connection with urban life. Recently, a project to establish an official website was launched, but it is still under construction.



Figure 13. Madinahwelcoming webpage, under construction Source:<http://almadinahtourism.sa>

6.3. Cultural urban branding in Madinah

The city of Madinah already has a strong brand because of its religious role in Islamic society. This affects the image of the city on all levels. Though that, the city of Madinah aims to have continuous improvement. Through a promising initiative to humanise the city, Madinah plans to strengthen its urban brand image with human-based development. This objective is to build the urban environment of the city according to high standards, inspired by the city heritage and holy brand image.

Many brand strategies have been developed to achieve the vision of 'humanising the city to live and visit.' These take in account that the city culture and identity must remain a baseline that cannot be neglected. This can be seen in the development strategies discussed above. The effect of the city culture and identity can be seen in urban projects, city-life activities, events, cultural activities and architectural features.

Based on the case of Madinah, it can be concluded that urban branding that depends on culture, can help to re-imagine cities' identities, even those broken by the structural-based changes of past decades.

Through the analysis of the case of Madinah concerning principles of place branding and the city branding strategies according to Rehan (2014). The city of Madinah successfully integrated three main items: an original, well-established urban brand image; improvement plans that contain man-made and socio-cultural aspects; and integration of the city's soul (its culture and identity) in the brand development process. However, it was noticed that more efforts regarding the web-media-generated images are needed.

7. Conclusion

Culture can affect and support all city brand components, from a city's physical and economic aspects to its existence on international markets. Urban brand-image planning policies can also play a critical for cities that want to be considered in the global economy. Such branding often confirms the unique features of a city's culture and

creativity and promotes a desirable urban image. Therefore, linking community culture and urban branding strategies can be a significant development tool for cities, especially those with a history of strong cultural development (e.g. Madinah). This study has explained the key aspects of the relationship between culture and urban branding through an exploration of how culture impacts the development of the urban environment. This research has used Madinah, KSA, as a case study, analysing Madinah's principles of place branding and city branding strategies. The city of Madinah successfully integrated three main items: an original, well-established urban branding image; improvement plans that contain man-made and socio-cultural aspects; and integration of the city's soul (its culture and identity) in the brand development process.

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