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About Simon

Simon Anholt developed the concept of the Nation Brands Index in 2005 and the first Index was published in April 2005. He is recognized as one of the world's leading authorities on the branding of countries, regions and cities. Anholt advises a number of national governments and UN agencies on brand strategy, public diplomacy, cultural relations, investment and export promotion, tourism and economic development. He is the editor of the quarterly journal, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, and the author of *Brand New Justice*, *Brand America* and several other books.

When we express a preference for French holidays, German cars or Italian opera, when we instinctively trust the policies of the Swedish government, comment on the ambition of the Japanese, the bluntness of the Americans or the courtesy of the British, when we avoid investing in Romania, favour Turkey's entry into Europe or admire the heritage of China and India, we are responding to brand images in exactly the same way as when we're shopping for clothing or food.

But these are far bigger brands than Nike or Nestlé. They are the brands of nations.

Nation brand is an important concept in today's world. As a consequence of globalisation, all countries must compete with each other for the attention, respect and trust of investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, the media, and the governments of other nations: so a powerful and positive nation brand provides a crucial competitive advantage. It is essential for countries to understand how they are seen by publics around the world; how their achievements and failures, their assets and their liabilities, their people and their products are reflected in their brand image.

The nation brand is the sum of people's perceptions of a country across six areas of national competence. Together, these areas make what I call the Nation Brand Hexagon: According to a survey I carry out four times a year amongst 18,000 consumers in 18 different OECD countries, the Anholt-GMI Nation Brands Index, Turkey's brand image is currently very undeveloped and much misunderstood, and scores near the bottom of the table, just above Russia.



Fig 1: The Nation Brand Hexagon © Simon Anholt 2002

Turkey's overall low score, however, is mainly the result of it failing to achieve high scores in any category (and arguably this is partly because so few people have any direct experience of the country, its people or products, and spend relatively little time thinking about it), unlike Russia's which is the result of extremely low scores in several crucial categories. Looking at the data, Turkey appears to be more of a 'blank canvas', a country about which many people have few opinions; on the other hand, almost everybody has an opinion about Russia, and it is likely to be a poor one.

The survey clearly shows that both countries have a long way to go before they can improve their international reputations. The difference is that Turkey has a lot to prove, a process which is likely to be much helped in the future by EU accession, whereas Russia has a great deal to disprove before it can even start acquiring positive brand attributes.

In the domain of brands and products, consumers have difficulty associating Turkey with anything they might actually want to buy: textiles is the only categories which they spontaneously link to Turkey, spelling difficulties for any Turkish companies in other product or service areas who might be planning to launch explicitly Turkish products in overseas markets. It would appear that none of the Turkish brands which I described in my previous book, *Brand New Justice*, have yet achieved enough fame in Europe, North America or the Asia-Pacific region to have improved the reputation of their country of origin.

To understand how the people of each country are viewed in my survey, I first asked a 'business-to-business' question ("Imagine you are a manager and need to make an important hiring. Please rank the following countries in order of your preference for the nationality of your candidate") and a 'non-business' question ("Please rank how hospitable the people are in the following countries") – this aspect of the 'human' dimension is also of critical importance when considering the tourism potential of each country. Respondents were also asked to select the adjective which best describes the people in each country. Again, the picture for Turkey is pretty bleak and it comes at the bottom of the table: but at least the adjective most frequently applied to Turks is 'hard working'.

It is most disappointing that Turkey scores so

low on the culture and tourism axes: yet here, surely, is the area in which Turkey's brand image shows the greatest potential for improvement and increased warmth of feeling. Brand Turkey is – or should be – a rich treasure-house of positive cultural associations – the rich cultural heritage, history and landscapes of this lovely country and the warmth and hospitality of the people – all of which surely do not lie too far beneath the surface of Western consciousness to be retrieved and revitalised. I have often spoken of the need for the United States today to learn again how to practise inspired cultural diplomacy in order to revive its faltering brand: for Turkey, the need is even more urgent, and the remedy even more appropriate. I would argue vigorously for Turkey to invest substantially in cultural diplomacy.

Money and effort expended in cultural relations is never wasted. The cultural aspects of the nation brand are very closely linked with the country's tourism assets, and where there is a strong consumer perception of cultural wealth there is likely to be a strong tourist industry, or at least the potential for building it; it also creates a background of warm, positive associations which benefit exports, inward investment and even international relations.

Even in tourism, the area where most people must surely have positive associations with Turkey, the message is failing to get through; yet tourism plays a vital role in communicating attractive images of the country, and encouraging what marketers might call 'product trial'.

Branding the Nation: a Necessary Part of Modern Statecraft

A nation's brand image is its most valuable asset: it is national identity made robust, tangible, communicable, and – at its best – made useful.

Turkey urgently needs to harness and take control of its own brand image, and put it to work in the highly competitive marketplace of today's globalised world. Looking at Turkey's scores in my survey makes one realise how serious a barrier to progress a poor image can be, obscuring and even obstructing the real progress being made in some areas. Turkey has a long way to go before it can really prosper in the global 'marketplace' for tourists, investors, consumers, talent and for the respect and

attention of the world's media and other governments. Taking a brand-oriented perspective on the reforms and investments which are needed ensures that progress is efficient, focused, and strategically driven for quicker and longer lasting results.

The brand images of countries, whether good or bad, are seldom an entirely accurate reflection of the reality of the country. In the case of developing countries, the most common reason for this disconnect between image and reality is time: the country may change quite quickly, but its image lags behind by years or decades and sometimes even centuries. Turkey, in common with many developing economies, suffers from an image which has been forged during an earlier and very different political era, and which now constantly obstructs its political, economic, cultural and social aspirations. In many ways, Turkey's brand image today in the West is in the same shape as if Atatürk had never lived.

It is widely believed, however, that little can be done to correct a country's image: one can blame the media, people's ignorance, globalisation or one's own history, but apparently not even the richest countries can do much to change a negative stereotype once it has become ingrained. Even America, with its virtually limitless resources and influence over the world's media, now seems unable to restore its failing image.

But there are enough examples and enough 'best practice' to prove that a country's international reputation can be managed and changed to better represent the current reality and future aspirations of the place, as long as there is a clear strategy for doing so, leadership, and proper coordination between government, the public and private sector, and the population in general.

This message is of critical importance to Turkey, which simply doesn't have the time to wait until its image catches up with the rapid pace of its development. For Turkey, nation branding represents a way of ensuring that its fundamental human qualities, its efforts, achievements and ambitions are seen, acknowledged, and properly interpreted in its own region and beyond. European accession is merely one of many areas in which a better managed nation brand would reap improved performance.

In a deeper sense, place branding also provides a way for Turkey to re-establish and broadcast its true cultural, social and historical identity, and carve out a positive and helpful place for itself in the global community.

In this sense, national brand is national identity made tangible, robust, communicable and useful. It is without doubt the single most valuable item of intellectual property which any nation possesses; and knowing how to protect, develop and exploit this asset is the key for translating the intangible wealth of Turkey into sustained economic growth and international respect.