

Manuela Guerreiro / Júlio Mendes /
Carlos Fortuna / Patrícia Pinto

The dynamic nature of the city image: Do image components evolve over time?

Abstract

In this study, we propose that the city image is a multidimensional construct influenced by its image components which, together, affect tourist behaviour in a dynamic process. The general objective of this research is to understand the dynamic nature of a major tourism destination image and the relationships among its components from the tourists' perspective. This study is exploratory and descriptive. Data was collected from tourists' surveys applied in two different moments at Istanbul: before the launching of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) (Moment 1), and one year later, during the ECoC (Moment 2). The proposed model was estimated and tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). The comparison of data from the two moments indicates different patterns of relationships. Findings contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic nature of a city image by investigating the relationships among different image components in two different moments, before and after a major cultural event. Future studies should investigate further the unique image construct given the importance of local identity in brand and event communication. Additionally, research should investigate the impact of events on the formation of the affective component of image and behavioural intentions among tourists.

Key words: city image; image components; cultural events; structural equation modelling; Turkey

1. Introduction

Places host events to provide visitors with unique opportunities to live memorable experiences which, in turn, enhance destination appeal and attractiveness (De Geus, Richards, & Toepoel, 2016; Ooi, Håkanson, & LaCava, 2014). Surprisingly, local identity is increasingly recognized as a relevant unique selling proposition, actively adding value to places (cities, regions, or countries) and positively affecting tourist attractiveness and image. Events—especially cultural ones—have become a tool used by destinations to differentiate themselves from competitors and become more attractive on the global stage (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte, & Folgado-Fernández, 2018; Kerlund & Müller, 2012; Todd, Leask, & Ensor, 2017). Recognized as an effective place marketing tool (De Brito & Richards, 2017; Getz, 2008, 1991; Gómez, Fernández, Molina, & Aranda, 2018; Guerreiro, Valle, & Mendes, 2011; Richards & Wilson, 2004), events are expected to add a festive atmosphere to the host city (Richards & Palmer, 2010); inspire affection in visitors and residents; and create meaning, feelings, and emotions (Brás, Mendes, Guerreiro, & Sequeira, 2019; De Geus et al., 2016; Johnstone, 2012).

Manuela Guerreiro, PhD, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Portugal; Researcher, Research Centre of Tourism, Sustainability and Wellbeing (CinTurs), Algarve, Portugal; e-mail: mmguerre@ualg.pt

Júlio Mendes, PhD, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Portugal; Researcher, Research Centre of Tourism, Sustainability and Wellbeing (CinTurs), Algarve, Portugal; e-mail: jmendes@ualg.pt

Carlos Fortuna, PhD, Full Professor, Economics Faculty of University of Coimbra, Portugal; Researcher at the Centre for Social Sciences (CES), Coimbra, Portugal; e-mail: cfortuna@fe.uc.pt

Patrícia Pinto, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Portugal; Researcher, Research Centre of Tourism, Sustainability and Wellbeing (CinTurs), Algarve, Portugal; e-mail: pvalle@ualg.pt

The image of a tourist city corresponds to a mental map consisting of a set of attributes that define it as a destination and influence tourist behaviour (Beerli & Martin, 2004a, b; Kim, Styliadis, & Oh, 2019). The image is recognized as a multiple, complex, and dynamic construct (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002) which can play an important role in choosing a destination, affect tourist satisfaction, and influence revisit intention (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, b; Chi & Qu, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Elliot, Papadopoulod, & Kim, 2011; Gallarza et al., 2002; Pike, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Despite numerous studies on this topic (Xiao, Jafari, Cloke, & Tribe, 2013), there is a certain lack of consistency in the operationalization of the concept of the image, which is not yet fully understood. Some authors have pointed out the need to develop an agreed conceptual framework on this subject (Gomez et al., 2018; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Lai & Li, 2015; Young, 1999). As recognized by Lai and Li (2015, p. 1), "the line of research on Tourism Destination Image remains challenged". The authors identified the existence of few studies comparing different destinations and on how visitors form their images of destinations or how these images evolve (Jani & Nguni, 2016; Kim et al., 2019; Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio, & Nazzareno, 2017; Ooi et al., 2014). Thomas and Richins (2003, p. 387) referred to the existence of an "occasional focus on cities" within the framework of image studies. However, research on the influence of events—mainly cultural events—on city image is still scarce (Brás et al., 2019; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018).

The general objective of this research is to investigate and interpret tourists' image of Istanbul by understanding the latent dimensions of this city image formation in two periods. Thus, this study intends to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic nature of the image construct and the relationships among its components considering two different moments in the city's life: before the launching of the ECoC and during the event.

Data for this study was collected from surveys applied to tourists at two different moments: before the launching of the ECoC (Moment 1), and one year later, during the ECoC (Moment 2).

To identify the factors that compose the image of Istanbul, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted on the data from the two moments. The nature of the relationships among the components of the city image was assessed by estimating and testing structural equation models. The results have important theoretical and empirical implications for increasing the attractiveness of this well-established tourist city split between Europe and Asia, by using events as a strategic tool to improve destination attractiveness.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Destination image and tourist behaviour

The understanding of tourists' image of destinations and the factors that contribute to its formation are critical issues for places aiming to become attractive destinations. Image management is increasingly recognized as a relevant marketing practice to gain competitive advantages (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Gartner, 1989, 1993; Kong, Cros, & Ong, 2015; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2014; Peña, Jamilena, & Molina, 2012). Moreover, it is widely accepted that city image influences tourist behaviour in different ways, in particular, during the decision-making process before the visit; these images include perceived quality, satisfaction, affection, perceived value, loyalty, and positive experience (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Gartner, 1989, 1993; Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2010; Lee et al., 2014; Martín-Santana et al., 2017).

2.2. Destination image: Its dynamic and complex nature

Destination image is generally considered as a complex construct and, since the early 1970s, it has been one of the most studied topics in the fields of marketing and tourism. Despite the lack of a common conceptual framework, a generally accepted definition of a tourism destination image is "holistic/mental impressions/perceptions held by tourists about a destination" (Lai & Li, 2015, p. 5). The place attracting tourists can be a destination area, or region, (Matos, Mendes, & Valle, 2015), an island (Moon & Han, 2018), a country (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019; Hahm, Tasci, & Terry, 2019; Jani & Nguni, 2016; Matiza & Oni, 2014; Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008), or a city (Gilboa, Jaffe, Vianelli, Pastore, & Herstein, 2015; Luque-Martínez, Barrio-García, Ibáñez-Zapata, & Molina, 2007). Different authors have had different approaches to the study of image (Lai & Li, 2015); however, they have considered it a dynamic process (Gallarza et al., 2002). As a dynamic process, it differs according to the stage of the travel experience (Gallarza et al., 2002; Jani & Nguni, 2016; Kim et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2014; Martín-Santana et al., 2017), and it is especially linked to time (Kim, Mc Kercher, & Lee, 2009; Martín-Santana et al., 2017) and space (Gallarza et al., 2002; Stylidis & Cherifi, 2018).

According to Lee et al. (2014, p. 243), "an unanswered question is what makes the change happen". Gunn (1988) argued that, once the tourist is at the destination, the image—as a personal construction—is affected and modified by the individual's interaction with the place.

Kim et al. (2019) studied the variations in the perceived image over three periods—before, during, and after travel—using the same sample. Still, most studies on image focus on a certain moment in time, using one-off data collection. The reasons that lead people over time to change the image they have of a destination have also been addressed: advertising campaigns (Pan, Santos, & Kim, 2017); TV series/films (Busby & Haines, 2013; Kim, Kim, Agrusa, & Lee, 2012; Terzidou, Stylidis, & Terzidis, 2018); social media (Kim, Choe, & Lee, 2018; Pike, Gentle, Kelly, & Beatson, 2018); or mega-events, especially sports events (Deng & Li, 2013; Hahm et al., 2019; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Lai, 2018). In a study investigating the image of South Korea before and after the 2002 World Cup, Kim and Morrison (2005) concluded that tourists' image of the country was more positive after the event. Lai (2018) studied the influence of event image on destination image by collecting data among Chinese tourists visiting Beijing during the 2008 Olympic Games. Hahm et al. (2019) tracked the influence of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games on South Korea's image. Gomez et al. (2018), in a study of city branding in five European capitals, used city image as one of the variables in the model. Only a few studies have addressed the city image in its relation to cultural events (Brás et al., 2019; Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018).

Brás et al. (2019) examined the perceptions, meanings, and experiences of residents in the context of cultural events in a small inland city. Research by Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2018) focused on understanding the effect of cultural events, especially small-scale events, on the image of cities with a rich heritage. The authors concluded that these events increase the cognitive and affective components of the image and enhance the capacity of the city to attract visitors.

Events—generally considered a social phenomenon—can be defined as temporary and special happenings, recognized by their social and economic relevance as well as their contribution to the liveliness and social cohesion of a place, and they are usually seen as an effective place marketing tool (De Brito & Richards, 2017; Deng & Li, 2013; Getz, 2008; Guerreiro et al., 2011; Hassanien & Dale, 2011; Kerlund & Müller, 2012; Richards & Wilson, 2004). In addition, events also inspire affection and create meaning, feelings, and emotions for visitors and residents (De Geus et al., 2016; Johnstone, 2012).

2.3. Components of destination image

The complexity of the destination image construct has led to the consensual assumption that it encompasses different dimensions or components. There is widespread agreement in the tourism marketing literature that destination image is a mix of three different, although interrelated, components: cognitive, affective, and conative (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Beerli & Martin, 2004a, 2004b; Chen & Uysal, 2002; Gartner, 1993; Pike, 2007; Pike & Ryan, 2004).

Firstly, the image construct was addressed only in the cognitive dimension. However, scholars have broadened the construct by including the cognitive and affective dimensions (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b; Chen & Uysal, 2002; Crompton, 1979; Gartner, 1989, 1993; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Kim et al., 2019; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Stern & Krakover, 1993), which can also change over time (Lee et al., 2014). Other authors have added more specific characteristics of places, recognizing their role in global image formation (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). As noted, there is a modification of the structural elements of image influenced by different aspects: further information, experience at the destination, personal profile, tourist motivations, and events in the place (Gunn, 1988; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Deng & Li, 2013; Lai, 2018; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018; Mendes, Valle, & Guerreiro, 2011).

The cognitive component is the set of beliefs and knowledge of an object, leading to the construction of an image about its attributes (Gartner, 1993), referring to a place's resources or attractions (Stabler, 1995). Based on logical reasoning, tourists form impressions of the places and evaluate them attribute by attribute (Peña et al., 2012; Styliadis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007).

According to Ward and Russell (1981), the meaning of a place is determined not only by its physical characteristics. Image results from a process of interpretation that involves components that are rational (beliefs or cognitive elements) and emotional (feelings and affection) (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). The emotional or affective component of the image refers to feelings about the place (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Beerli & Martin, 2004b; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Russell & Pratt, 1980). The cognitive component is considered an antecedent of the affective component, given that evaluation draws on the knowledge that individuals have about the objects (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2013; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Beerli & Martín, 2004a, 2004b; Beerli-Palacio & Nazzareno, 2017; Gartner, 1993; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Nguyễn-Phú, 2014; Qu et al., 2011; Russell, Ward, & Pratt, 1981; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Styliadis et al., 2017).

In general, authors consider that the overall image, or the composite, holistic, or gestalt image, corresponds to an overall impression that simplifies the decision-making process (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Styliadis et al., 2017). Previous research shows that the cognitive component has a positive effect on the overall image, directly, or through the affective component (Lin et al., 2007; Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Qu et al., 2011; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Styliadis et al., 2017). Moreover, the affective component seems to be positively related to the overall image (Lin et al., 2007; Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Qu et al., 2011).

The conative or behavioural component of destination image "is the action component, which builds on the cognitive and affective stages" (Dann, 1996, p. 49), and it simplifies the decision-making process (Beerli & Martin, 2004 a; Gartner, 1993; Lin et al., 2007; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Martín-Santana et al., 2017; Nadeau et al., 2008; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Qu et al., 2011; Stepchenkova & Mills,

2010; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Styliadis et al., 2017). Also, some authors have argued that emotions and feelings can be relevant predictors of behaviour (Agapito et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2007; Russell & Snodgrass, 1987; Styliadis et al., 2017).

Place image seems to be rooted in specific features (Beerli & Martin, 2004a; Chen, Lin, & Petrick, 2013; Qu et al., 2011); thus, these should be studied so that their role in destination image formation is understood. In this sense, the unique image consists of distinctive features and the aura (or essence) of places (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Espelt & Benito, 2006; Qu et al., 2011), which, in turn, is deeply intertwined with place identity, which "comprises the way a city is experienced by its various stakeholders" (Gilboa et al., 2015, p. 50). Royo-Vela (2009) argued that there is a gap in the literature regarding city image, as it seldom includes the peculiarities of places. Being cognitive in nature, this component seems to be related to the affective and overall components of destination image (Qu et al., 2011).

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the dynamic nature of destination image components and the relationships among them by analysing data collected in two stages: pre-event and during the event. Based on the literature review, the proposed theoretical model (Figure 1) with seven research hypotheses (Table 1) was tested in two different moments in the same city—Istanbul—before and during the European Capital of Culture event.

Figure 1
Proposed research model and hypotheses

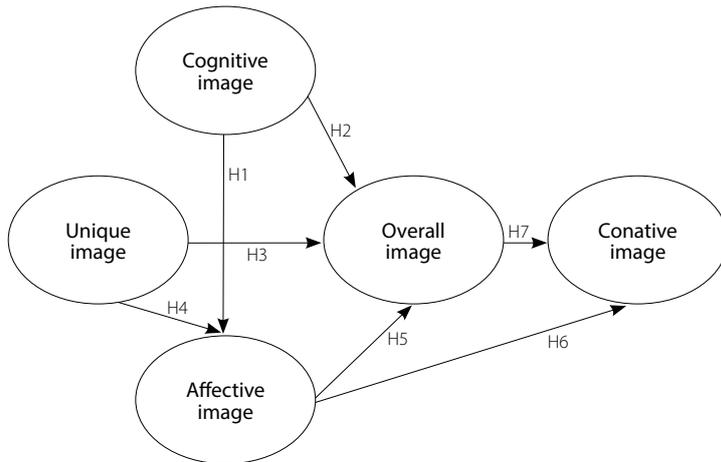


Table 1
Research hypotheses

H1	The cognitive component is positively related to the affective image of the city.
H2	The cognitive component is positively related to the overall image of the city.
H3	The unique component is positively related to the overall image of the city.
H4	The unique component is positively related to the affective image of the city.
H5	The affective component is positively related to the overall image of the city.
H6	The affective component is positively related to the conative image of the city.
H7	The overall image is positively related to the conative image of the city.

3. Methodology

3.1. Setting

Istanbul, with over 15 million inhabitants, is the most emblematic city in the country and the largest city in Europe. It is the financial, cultural, and tourist heart of Turkey, a country with around 76.9 million inhabitants (OECD, 2019) which, in 2005, started negotiations to join the European Union. Istanbul has a rich, cultural, historical, and natural heritage that makes the city an attractive place to live, visit, and invest in (Masoumi, Terzi, & Serag, 2019), being one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Istanbul hosted the ECoC event in 2010 (European Commission, 2006) with a cultural programme developed around the four elements (earth, air, water, and fire), which have a special meaning to this city (Rampton, McAteer, Mozuraityte, Levai, & Akçalı, 2011).

The study was conducted in Istanbul in two different periods: Moment 1, in October and November 2009 (before the beginning of Istanbul ECoC) and, in Moment 2, in September and October 2010 (during the final phase of Istanbul ECoC).

3.2. Measurement development

The measurement development included three stages: expert panel, qualitative method, and quantitative method.

Expert panel. The first stage consisted of item identification from an extensive literature review. A panel of 30 experts from academia participated in the selection of relevant items to measure the cognitive dimension of the city destination image. The process was conducted by email, and a 7-point Likert scale was used to measure attribute importance. Afterwards, the results were validated by a panel of three experts in the tourism and marketing fields for content validity and clarity. In the end, 17 cognitive attributes were considered suitable for measuring the cognitive dimension of city image.

Qualitative method. The attributes used to evaluate the unique image of Istanbul resulted from a previous exploratory study of a qualitative nature. An open-ended questionnaire was designed to identify functional and psychological attributes that best describe the uniqueness of the city (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011). The members of the ECoC mission team in Istanbul participated in that study using the Google Drive platform. The free elicitation technique was used (Jenkins, 1999) because it allows participants to describe the target stimulus in terms that are salient to them, rather than responding to researchers' predetermined image dimensions (Reilly, 1990). In doing so, the researcher reduces the risk of influencing responses with a standardised framework that may not be an accurate representation of respondents' image of that object. A word frequency analysis was used to rank the cognitive attributes of the city. The highest-frequency words were included in questionnaires to tourists. The words were: *shopping, cultural sightseeing, Bosphorus, heritage, nervous, exotic, mystery, curious, and chaotic*.

Quantitative method. In the main stage of the research, two surveys were conducted with tourists visiting the chosen places. Moment 1 occurred between October and November 2009 and Moment 2 between September and October 2010. Given the difficulty of surveying the target population of the study, a sample of 384 tourists was defined for each moment, for a confidence level of 95% and an error of 5%.

3.3. Data collection instrument and pre-test procedures

The measurement scales included the cognitive image, affective image, overall image, and conative image (Agapito et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Qu et al., 2011; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Styliadis et al., 2017) as well as the unique image (Qu et al., 2011).

The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into German by a native German speaker. Then, both the original and the translation were double revised by native speakers to validate the versions.

A pre-test with 60 participants was conducted by the research team in Istanbul to check that the questionnaire was easy to understand and to assess clarity and usefulness of the measurement items and scales. Following the results obtained, the original Likert and differential semantic 7-point scales were replaced by 5-point scales because of the difficulties respondents had in understanding the differences between response options presented. Recently, other researchers (Dedeoglu, Bilgihanb, Buonincontrid, & Okumus, 2018; Jani & Nguni, 2016) also chose a 5-point instead of a 7-point scale because it was easier to handle and easier for respondents to understand.

3.4. Data collection and analysis approach

Given the research characteristics, the objectives of the study, and the process of data collection, we opted for cluster sampling, useful when dealing with large populations that can be grouped into units or clusters (Malhotra, 2004; Smith, 2010). Accordingly, the interviewers (between 6 and 10 members recruited from the ECoC volunteers) invited all tourists at each chosen tourist site (Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia Museum, Bosphorus, and Topkapi Palace) to participate in the study, briefly explaining the research objectives, clearing up doubts, and collecting the completed questionnaires at the end. These sites were part of a list of 10 relevant tourist attractions in the city that were pointed out by the ECoC team. They were considered for this study because they were included in the event programme. In total, 508 and 405 valid questionnaires were completed and collected in Moment 1 and Moment 2, respectively.

3.5. Data analysis

The proposed model was estimated and tested using partial least squares (PLS) path modelling and SmartPLS v. 2.0 software (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005).

4. Results

4.1. Sample characteristics

In Moment 1, the respondents were mostly men, with a mean age of 35 and a standard deviation of 14, married or single, and with a university degree. The countries of origin more represented in the sample were Germany, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The mean length of stay in Istanbul was 6.1 days. In Moment 2, the respondents were mainly women with a mean age of 31, single, with university education. The respondents were mostly from the United Kingdom, Italy, Holland, and France, and the mean length of stay was 6.5 days. Table 2 compares the most relevant socio-demographic characteristics of the samples in the two moments.

Table 2
Sample profile

Variable	Moment 1	Moment 2
Gender	female: 42%; male: 58%	female: 55%; male: 45%
Age	mean: 35; standard deviation: 14	mean: 31.1; standard deviation: 12.2
Country of origin	Germany: 13%; Spain: 12%; US: 9%; UK: 9%; Italy: 7%; France: 6%; Greece: 4%; Australia: 3%; Canada: 3%; Netherlands: 3%; Denmark: 2%; others: 29%	UK: 11%; Italy: 8%; Netherlands: 7%; France: 6%; Spain: 4%; US: 4%; Poland: 3%; Others: 40%
Level of education completed	primary: 2%; secondary: 15%; tertiary: 83%	primary: 1.2%; secondary: 10%; tertiary: 88.8%
Average length of stay	6.1 days; standard deviation: 5.1 days	6.5 days; standard deviation: 4.2 days

4.2. Measurement model assessments

All loadings in Moment 1 exceeded 0.707, meaning that the items are individually reliable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). In Moment 2, there were some lower loadings. However, given the exploratory nature of our study and because their elimination would not improve the model, they were kept in the analysis (Hair et al., 2017). The composite reliability measures—the construct reliability coefficients (CR) and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α)—were greater than threshold values for all latent variables ($CR > 0.7$; $\alpha > 0.7$), meaning that the constructs are reliable in Moments 1 and 2 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2011) (Table 3).

Table 3
Assessment of the measurement model

Constructs	Items	Loading	Boots-trapping t value	Compo-site reliability	Cron-bach's alpha	AVE (average variance extracted)
Moment 1						
Cognitive image	• Festive ambience and tourism	0.801	11.957	0.89	0.84	0.66
	• Architecture, history, and gastronomy	0.782	8.916			
	• Cleanliness, safety, and accommodation	0.856	16.134			
	• Events and natural landscapes	0.817	13.984			
Unique image	• Cultural heritage and Bosphorus	0.848	6.971	0.89	0.77	0.81
	• The atmosphere of the city	0.944	6.143			
Affective image	• Arousing/sleepy	0.893	45.297	0.90	0.79	0.82
	• Pleasant/unpleasant	0.923	78.469			
Overall image	• Overall image	1.000	0.000	--	--	--
Conative image	• Intention to recommend	0.972	86.811	0.97	0.94	0.94
	• Intention to return	0.969	49.010			
Moment 2						
Cognitive image	• Festive ambience	0.789	9.784	0.76	0.60	0.45
	• Gastronomy, architecture, and attractions	0.675	6.026			
	• Tourist attractions	0.604	4.258			
	• Events and natural landscapes	0.598	4.268			
Unique image	• Cultural landscape and Bosphorus	0.816	8.888	0.79	0.46	0.65
	• The atmosphere of the city	0.793	7.404			
Affective image	• Arousing/sleepy	0.848	17.511	0.85	0.66	0.75
	• Pleasant/unpleasant	0.879	28.090			
Overall image	• Overall image	1.000	0.000	--	--	--
Conative image	• Intention to recommend	0.938	14.962	0.94	0.88	0.89
	• Intention to return	0.949	26.310			

Convergent validity was assessed by examining factor loadings, reliabilities, and extracted variance. Results show that all indicators load significantly in the corresponding constructs (t -bootstrap > 2.585 , assuming a 1% significance level) in both moments. Convergent validity is also confirmed by the constructs' AVE that should be greater than 0.5 (Dillon & Goldstein, 1984). In Moment 2, this criterion is not verified for the *cognitive image*, reporting an AVE slightly lower.

To evaluate the discriminant validity, the criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) was applied, which requires computing the correlations between the latent variables and comparing them with the AVEs. The square root of the AVE for a particular construct exceeds the correlations between this

construct and any other construct, thus suggesting adequate discriminant validity (Chin, 1998; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This means that the latent variables are measuring different concepts (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4
Discriminant validity analysis—Moment 1

	Affective image	Cognitive image	Unique image	Conative image
Affective image	0.906*			
Cognitive image	0.254	0.812*		
Unique image	0.108	0.599	0.900*	
Conative image	0.545	0.109	0.077	0.969*
Overall image	0.580	0.185	0.157	0.635

*Diagonal values are the square root of AVE for each latent variable used to assess the Fornell–Larcker Criterion.

Table 5
Discriminant validity analysis—Moment 2

	Affective image	Cognitive image	Unique image	Conative image
Affective image	0.866*			
Cognitive image	0.225	0.671*		
Unique image	0.226	0.534	0.806*	
Conative image	0.331	0.190	0.136	0.943*
Overall image	0.285	0.196	0.212	0.198

*Diagonal values are the square root of AVE for each latent variable used to assess the Fornell–Larcker Criterion.

4.3. Structural model assessments and hypothesis testing

After reliability and validity were assessed, we examined the structural model to test the research hypotheses in the two different moments. Table 6 shows the estimated path coefficients for the two moments. As all hypotheses involved a one-sided test, the *t*-bootstrap values were compared with the critical value 1.645 (assessing the research hypotheses involved one-sided tests). At Moment 1, hypotheses H1, H3, H5, H6, and H7 have a positive path coefficient as well as an associated *t* value greater than 1.645, meaning that these research hypotheses are supported. In contrast, the findings do not support H2 and H4. At Moment 2, the path coefficients are positive and statistically significant in the case of H1, H3, H4, H5, and H6, supporting the corresponding research hypotheses. H2 and H7 are not supported.

Table 6
Results for the structural models and test of hypotheses

Mo- ment	Hypothesis	Path estimate	t	Result
M1	(H1) The cognitive component is positively related to the affective component of the image of the city.	0.296	3.993	Supported
M2	(H1) The cognitive component is positively related to the affective component of the image of the city.	0.146	2.117	Supported
M1	(H2) The cognitive component is positively related to the overall image of the city.	-0.028	0.486	Not supported
M2	(H2) The cognitive component is positively related to the overall image of the city.	0.081	1.284	Not supported
M1	(H3) The unique component is positively related to the overall image of the city.	0.12	1.729	Supported
M2	(H3) The unique component is positively related to the overall image of the city.	0.114	1.665	Supported

Table 6 Continued

M1	(H4) The unique component is positively related to the affective component of the image of the city.	-0.070	1.042	Not supported
M2	(H4) The unique component is positively related to the affective component of the image of the city.	0.149	2.056	Supported
M1	(H5) The affective component is positively related to the overall image of the city.	0.575	7.934	Supported
M2	(H5) The affective component is positively related to the overall image of the city.	0.241	3.283	Supported
M1	(H6) The affective component is positively related to the conative component of the image of the city.	0.267	4.623	Supported
M2	(H6) The affective component is positively related to the conative component of the image of the city.	0.299	3.089	Supported
M1	(H7) The overall image is positively related to the conative component of the image of the city.	0.480	7.716	Supported
M2	(H7) The overall image is positively related to the conative component of the image of the city.	0.113	0.871	Not Supported

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we proposed that city image is a multidimensional construct, influenced by the cognitive, unique, affective, and overall components that together affect tourist behaviour (conative component of image). The image of the city is considered to be a dynamic construct (Gallarza et al., 2002; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Kim et al., Martín-Santana et al., 2017) that can be influenced by specific factors, in different moments of the city life. In this study, we compared tourists' image of Istanbul in two distinct moments. This city is strongly marked by a unique cultural heritage, which the ECoC event in 2010 sought to emphasize.

The results showed that the cognitive component of the image directly affects the formation of the affective component, which is consistent with previous studies (Beerli & Martín, 2004a, 2004b; Gartner, 1993; Lin et al., 2007; Martín & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Stern & Krakover, 1993). However, some outcomes endorse the recognized dynamic nature of the image. The local dimension of the cognitive image—here called the unique component of the image—positively affects the overall image of the city (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2011), but this finding is not consistent across the two moments. It has a special performance by also influencing the affective component of the image during the ECoC event, which plays a critical role in the intention to return to the place (Bigné et al., 2001). The local aspects that are unique to this tourist city were highlighted in the event programme (European Commission, 2006; Rampton et al., 2011), giving rise to emotions about the place (De Geus et al., 2016; Johnstone, 2012). The emphasis on identity and unique aspects of local culture in the ECoC cultural programme may explain the positive role of the unique component of the image in the formation of tourists' feelings and attitudes towards Istanbul. Also, results do not support the relationship between cognitive image and overall image of the city in either of the two moments investigated. Therefore, the evaluation based on cognitive characteristics does not have a direct effect on overall image formation. This can be due to the different formulation of the cognitive construct of the image, here including the unique characteristics of Istanbul's image. The relationship between the unique image and the overall image of the city is positive in both moments. During the ECoC, the unique component of the image has an influential role in the affective component. This can be explained by the fact that the ECoC emphasizes the unique character of cities through a programme that enhances the genuine and differentiating cultural attributes of places (Gilboa et al., 2015; Hughes, Allen, & Wasil, 2003; Ooi et al., 2014; Rampton et al., 2011; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Smith, 2005).

As expected, this study supports previous findings that the affective image influences overall and conative components of image (Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999 b; Lin et al., 2007; Qu et al., 2011; Russell & Snodgrass, 1987), both during and before the ECoC event. It confirms the relevance of the affective relationship between individuals and cities with an impact on the way tourists perceive their future behaviour in terms of intention to return and to recommend a destination to friends and family. This line of reasoning underlies the explanation for the fact that the influential role of the overall component on the conative component of the image is not consistent in both moments. Before the ECoC event, we found a valid relationship between the two components, which is consistent with the literature (Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b), but during the ECoC, this hypothesis was not supported. A stronger influential role of the affective component on behavioural intentions is a relevant finding of this study. The unique characteristics of the city image create positive feelings, which are linked to the intention to return and to recommend a visit to the city, which is measured through the conative component of the image. Moreover, some authors have argued that events contribute to stimulate behaviour, to evoke feelings and emotions, and to create value-added offers (Brás et al, 2019; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2011; Guerreiro et al., 2011; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). These findings may suggest a relevant role of events on some components of city image, which is a topic that is not fully explored in the literature.

Insights gained from this study can provide useful guidance for practitioners—e.g. destination and event managers—especially in regard to strategies to change the image of a city. The salient performance of the unique component of the city image may suggest that local characteristics of the city may be of utmost relevance in city political strategies because these characteristics have great influence both on affective and overall image components and on behavioural intentions. Research results may support the adoption of policies to preserve local culture and heritage—tangible and intangible—as differentiators that can be the basis of place positioning and branding strategies. Enhancing the local and unique place features through events can be a differentiation strategy and a powerful marketing and branding tool for destinations, especially for places seeking to increase their tourist attractiveness. The recognizable dynamic nature of destination image components requires the adoption of an ongoing monitoring process to better inform decision making.

Our study has several limitations. Firstly, we assume that the image constructs are reflective. Indeed, this has been the procedure used in most previous studies modelling destination image using structural equation modelling. However, recent research has shown that this measurement mode is questionable, particularly regarding this specific construct (Mikulic & Ryan, 2018). Moreover, using reflective constructs when the construct would be better modelled as formative can distort results and lead to incorrect study conclusions. Accordingly, further studies must be conducted to better evaluate the destination image measurement mode, reflective or formative, and depending on this analysis, adopt different approaches for assessing reliability and validity (Mikulic, 2018). Secondly, this study uses data from two different samples. Data collection was based on the same criteria, although we consider that a longitudinal study would have provided a more precise follow-up on the dynamic nature of the city image. However, the chances of finding the same tourist, at two different times, in the same city, before and during the ECoC event, would be so remote as to make this investigation unfeasible. Nonetheless, given the relatively large sample sizes used in the two moments and their similar profiles, we are led to believe that the overall results regarding model estimation were not significantly affected using two different sets of respondents. Another limitation of the current study is that we opted for offering the questionnaire in only English and German, which hindered the participation of tourists who did not speak these languages.

Future research should also further examine the unique image construct given the recognized importance of local identity in brand and event communication. Other studies could also examine the impact of events on affective image formation and behavioural intentions. Finally, it would be interesting to replicate this methodology in new ECoC cities, and other typologies of events, to better understand their influence on the image formation of cities and tourist behaviour. In this way, we could obtain invariant measurement models in the two moments under analysis that would allow testing the significance of the differences between the path estimates of the research hypotheses, before and after the event, to better assess the impact of this type of event. To conclude, we hope this study will shed some light on the dynamic nature of the image of the city as a tourist destination.

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