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## Identification of Features for the City Branding: The Case of Shusha City, Azerbaijan as Tourism Destination

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### Abstract:

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the strategic importance of the creation of the city brand of Shusha, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan, based on the studies in the literature, and to determine the branding elements. The study was prepared in accordance with the methodology of qualitative research methods and is exploratory research. Systematic approach, synthesis and induction methods were used in the study. The branding of Shusha as a city of music, architecture, heroism, and culture is one of the results of the research. As a result of the study, the brand elements that can be used in the branding of the city of Shusha in Azerbaijan were tried to be determined. Brand elements that can be used in the branding of Shusha are Kharibulbul flower (*Ophrys Caucasica*), Karabakh horses, Shusha fortress, Govhar Agha mosque, mugham, carpet art, famous people. The creation of the Shusha city brand can make it one of the world's tourism destinations.

**Keywords:** branding; city branding; tourist destination; Shusha, Azerbaijan.

**JEL Classification:** M39; Z33; R11.

### Introduction

Modern cities, much like other goods, services, and ideas in marketing, develop their comparative advantage by making use of a variety of methods to achieve success in an environment that is already competitive. One of them is city branding (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019). Brands are assets that help consumers make decisions, represent value, make it easier to make purchases, and exhibit biased behavior. Due to the changes experienced over time, cities have had to brand themselves to advertise their unique attributes and sustain their existence. But a lot of elements go into this process. Consequently, city branding is a multidisciplinary area that involves managers, marketers, architects, urban planners, and tourist experts (Yayla, Kaya and Üstün 2021).

The necessity of having a brand for cities is listed as follows (Hanna and Rowley 2008):

- Increasing similarity of cities in terms of services offered;
- Increasing interest of people in seeing different cities and getting to know different cultures;
- Changes in the purchasing behavior of consumers and the increase in their economic power;
- Increasing and facilitating international travel opportunities and decreasing costs;
- The growing power of international media.

In addition to products and services, marketing also includes urban environments. City marketing has been used for a long time in many developed nations, even though it is a unique concept that has acquired popularity in many developing nations. In this sense, city marketing provides important benefits for revealing the city's potentials and empowering both the city and its citizens to effectively use these potentials (Liouris and

Deffner 2005). Marketing strategies and branding for cities are much more complex than those used to advertise products and services. This is due to the target market's uncertainty and that of the decision-makers (Altınbaş 2007).

Positive brand perceptions of nations have boosted exports, boosted economies, and attracted tourists, residents, and investment (Wilson and Richards 2008). Therefore, destination image and consumer perceptions, which are acknowledged as a prerequisite for successful destination marketing and effective and efficient strategic planning in the future, reinforce the positive images that already exist, correct the negative images, or create a new image that influences the choice of a particular destination (Pike and Ryan 2004, Leisan 2001).

There are branding studies on different cities in different dimensions. Namely, Birmingham in England (Parkenson and Saunders 2004), Vaasa in Finland (Laaksonen, Laaksonen, Borisov and Halkoaho 2006), Holon in Israel (Herstein and Jaffe 2008), Dubai in United Arab Emirates (Lee and Jain 2009), Milan in Italy (De Carlo, Canali, Pritchard and Morgan 2009), Hamburg in Germany (Zenker and Braun 2010), Almaty in Kazakhstan (Cheng and Taylor 2007), Istanbul (Başçı 2006, Sagdıç 2014, Torlak 2020), Eskişehir (Özsöz 2018) and Konya (Toksarı, İlyas and Dacı 2014) in Turkey have been examined in studies on city branding. However, in China (Zhang and Zhao 2009; Chen 2015; Berg and Björner 2014; Ma, de Jong, de Bruijne and Schraven 2020), Poland (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019), Brazil Studies on city branding have been carried out in Turkey (Brizotti-Pasquotto and Medrano 2014) and in other countries.

Since 1992, Azerbaijani Turks have been forced to relocate to other areas, where they are forced to live in far locations from the lands on which they were born and reared. The ceasefire deal that was reached in 1994 brought an end to the First Karabakh War, which was the most violent and protracted conflict that took place after a lengthy period of peace. In response to the provocation by the Armenians in the year 2020, the counterattack began on 27<sup>th</sup> of September and resulted in triumph 44 days later. This conflict culminated in the return of the seized lands of Azerbaijan, and the pact was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020, after Shusha had been freed on November 8<sup>th</sup>. The significance of Shusha for Azerbaijan is once again brought to light by the fact that the city will be given the title of "culture capital of the country" if it is finally freed from occupation in the year 2020.

The growth of the creative and cultural sectors may also help the tourist industry achieve its objectives. Due to the vast number of cultural tourist venues in Azerbaijan. On the other side, there is no research on city branding in Azerbaijan. This perspective led to the research being done on Shusha, the pearl of Karabakh, which has a position in Azerbaijan due to its rich natural and architectural heritage and profound spiritual beauty in the community. Given all of these factors, the primary goal of this research is to establish a strategy for branding Shusha, the city that has been designated as Azerbaijan's cultural capital.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. City Marketing and City Branding Concept

A city must have an identity to promote itself effectively (identity, image, and brand). The expression "the identity of the city" refers to what the city really is; its "brand" is how it wants to be recognized, and its "image" is how outsiders see it. City marketing explores the connections between these three concepts (Hospers 2004). City branding, in the words of Dinnie (2011), is "the purpose of maintaining people's lives, working, investing, learning, and visiting, rather than viewing a specific city as an ordinary settlement in the thoughts of the target audience". All of these actions are taken in an effort to turn them into places where people want to reside. The brand city, according to Sariyer and Altun (2019), also comprises activities like presenting the city, recreating it, and promoting the city's image by picking an open space in the marketplace. On the other hand, according to Kaypak (2013), a brand city is "the marketing of tangible, moral, historical, economic, social, and natural characteristics that are regarded distinctive to a city in a unique manner and generating a new brand".

The city brand, in general, is an advancement, image, and recognition project that a city implements as a support with its own distinctive sign, with its own unique aims, which are differentiated from other cities by combining with the historical, natural, cultural, and social features it contains. The city brand is a collection of unique ideologies that set the city and the possibilities it promotes apart from other cities on both a logical and emotional level (Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker 2013). Effective branding contributes to increasing the attractiveness of cities and thus their competitiveness in various fields. Cities with a clear, reliable, and attractive development vision have better development prospects (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski 2019).

Different cities in the world are branded according to different criteria. Namely, "buzz" and creative class like Las Vegas, New York and Turin (Storper and Venables 2004, Vanolo 2008), arts and culture like Berlin, Singapore and Barcelona (Ooi and Stöber 2010, Mihalis 2005), New York, Vancouver and creative industries such as Amsterdam (Mengi *et al.* 2017, Gasher 2002), iconic architecture such as Sao Paulo, Sydney and Baku

(Sklair 2010, Brizotti-Pasquotto and Medrano 2014), creative and cultural spaces such as Beijing, Toronto and Manchester (Evans 2015, McCarthy 2006) are some of the prominent city and positioning areas in brand city positioning. However, it is possible to divide the cities that started to reflect branding desires into 4 groups in terms of urban design and neighborhood forms (Table 1).

Table 1. Cities in terms of urban design and neighborhood forms

No	Spatial form	Key types	Examples
1.	Urban design	Squares, routes/avenues, parks/trails, pedestrian zones, public art, wayfaring	Centenary Square (Birmingham); La Villette (Paris); Olympic Park (London); High Line (New York), Barcelona waterfront
2.	Ethnic quarters	Area/street-naming, signage, gates, street furniture, festivals	'Chinatowns', 'Curry Miles'; Banglatown (East London); Arab Monde and Musee du Quai Banly (Paris); Little Portugal (Toronto)
3.	Heritage and cultural quarters	World heritage sites, heritage quarters and historic sites, arts districts/culture parks	Saltaire (Bradford); Lace Market, (Nottingham); Distillery District (Toronto); Kreuzberg (Berlin); Hua Shang Culture Park (Taipei, Taiwan); 789 Art district (Beijing)
4.	Creative industry quarters	Artist/crafts studios, managed workspaces/incubators, digital media/techno parks	SoHo 'Loft living' (New York); Liberty Village, (Toronto); Digital Shoreditch (East London); Amsterdam Noord; Eagle Yard/Adlershof, (Berlin); Sheffield cultural industries quarter

Source: Evans (2015)

Brand, city, loyalty, markets, consumption, quality, behavior, product, distinction, personality, and tourism were the terms with the strongest associations, according to a recent bibliographic review of published research on city branding (Lucarelli and Berg 2011).

## 1.2. Studies in the Literature on City Branding

The brand dimensions were found to be determined by material elements (such as culture, history, nightlife, shopping, infrastructure, housing, and business) and spiritual elements (such as personality and emotional aspects) in Parkenson's (2004) study, which used the qualitative research method for the branding of Birmingham, England. In their research on the branding of the Finnish city of Vaasa, Laaksonen *et al.* (2006) discovered four dimensions: nature, industry, culture, interior environment, and atmosphere.

In their research on the branding of Almaty, Kazakhstan, Cheng, and Taylor (2007) identified five dimensions: simplicity, cultural and ethnic variety, historical architecture, destinations, and leisure activities. Denmark is the smallest nation in Northern Europe, and Copenhagen, its capital, has made extensive use of its geographic characteristics, infrastructure development, role as a hub for commerce, education, and culture, and hosting of the government and royal family for marketing reasons. City marketing, which began after 1992, received an initial allocation of 22 million Danish Kroners, and this sum grew over the following years (Altınbaş 2007).

The research on the branding of the city of Israel by Herstein and Jaffe (2008) revealed three dimensions: the best mental connections, the city's demographic aspect, and the city's physical aspect. In their research of Gold Coast City, Australia, Merrilees, Miller, and Herington (2008) concentrated on elucidating the brand attitudes of city dwellers and looked at the primary antecedent elements that influence city brand attitudes. In the example of Turin (Torino) in Italy, the research by Vanolo (2008) examined experimentally how the creative city is honoured and promoted.

The city's advantages, disadvantages, threats, and opportunities have been researched because of a Lee and Jain (2009) study on Dubai's branding in the United Arab Emirates. DeCarlo *et al.* (2009) found four elements when researching Milan, Italy's branding. In the study conducted by Zenker and Braun (2010) on the branding of the German city of Hamburg, the optimum mental association state was determined using the brand concept map technique. The research of Huang, Oh, Zhang, and Choi (2013) assessed the relative significance of city brand and other city qualities concerning tourist destinations for a weekend vacation. The study focused on regional tourism markets surrounding New York and Buffalo. The study's findings show that characteristics including retail options, cuisine, culture, festivals, sports, natural attractions, and tourist activities are more important determinants of a city's brand.

The scholarly literature makes clear that China has significant expertise developing city branding (Zhang and Zhao 2009, Chen 2015, Berg and Bjorner 2014, Ma, de Jong, de Bruijne and Schraven 2020). Berg and Bjorner's (2014) research focused on the branding of Chinese megacities like Beijing and Shanghai. Wu (2000)

investigated Shanghai's urban growth and place promotion; Zhu, Qian, and Gao (2011) investigated Guangzhou's globalization and city image (Chen 2015, Zhang and Zhao 2009) Beijing Olympics.

Research on the marketing and branding of the Turkish city of Konya was conducted in 2014 by Toksarı, İlyas and Dagcı. Cop and Akpınar's (2014) study aimed to comprehend how university students saw their role in the branding of their various towns. Herget, Petru, and Abrahám (2015) examined how city branding affects the tourism industry's bottom line.

In the study conducted by Özsöz (2018), city branding, and marketing studies were evaluated independently, and the factors impacting each study's conclusions were noted. In the research by Dudek-Makowska and Grochowski (2019), it was looked at whether and how much creativity is used to brand cities, which are the capitals of the Polish provinces, as having favorable qualities. The study's findings showed that communities with strong creative potential and diverse economic growth bases saw the creative industry as one of their advantages.

## 2. Research Methodology

### The Purpose of the Study

Cities can be the subject of marketing as well as products and services. Marketing activities can also be applied for cities and branding studies can be carried out. In this direction, cities that successfully implement marketing and branding practices can attract more visitors, qualified people and investors to the city and become a more liveable city (Yücel and Öztürk 2018). From this point of view, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the strategic importance of the creation of the city brand of Shusha, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan, based on the studies in the literature, and to determine the branding elements.

### The Research Problem

The importance of the branding of Shusha, which is given the title of the cultural capital of Azerbaijan, is increasing due to the high natural, cultural, architectural, historical, political, and spiritual significance. From this point of view, answers to the following questions were sought in this study, in which qualitative methods were used:

- Why is the branding of the city of Shusha important?
- What is the significance of the branding of the city of Shusha for Azerbaijan?
- What features can be used in the creation of the Shusha city brand as tourism destination?

### Research Method

According to the technique of qualitative research methodologies, the study was created. It is an investigational study. The research included a literature review, systematic technique, synthesis, and induction techniques. Based on different studies in the literature, we have brought together the necessary steps to brand a city as a process. This process for city branding in order to become tourism destination, includes the following steps:

- Determining the vision of the city;
- Determining the positioning strategy of the city;
- Creating the image of the city;
- Determination of city identity elements (logo, symbol, slogan, color etc.);
- Identifying natural beauties in the city;
- Identifying products that are famous in the city;
- Determination of traditional cultural and entertainment activities in the city;
- Identification of historical and architectural places available in the city;
- Determination of historical days available in the city;
- Determining the right communication channels.

It is important to fully understand how tourists perceive places and how images influence their final choice in a particular destination (Girma and Manjit 2019). Considering all these and the above, it should be noted that it is important to determine the strategic roadmap for the branding of the city of Shusha.

## 3. Results and Findings

As can be seen from the literature research, various studies have been carried out in different countries on city branding. In line with the purpose of the research, answers to the research questions were sought based on the methodology of the research. As a result of this analysis based on the literature, it has been tried to determine the features that can be used in the creation of the Shusha city brand.



According to Ma, de Jong, de Bruijne and Schraven (2020), when creating a city brand, ideally, the current demographic and economic context, the future goals of its management should be considered, tough but realistic goals should be set, it should be attractive and different from its neighbors, and the brand should be applied in various areas for a long time. maturity should be considered. From this point of view, Shusha occupies a special place with its history and culture.

The buds on the rose bushes did not open for a long time in the cold of the night on a summer day and shriveled before opening. The most famous flower that grew in Shusha was the Kharibulbul (*Ophrys Caucasica*) and the elegant and timid Tabriz violet, which was also an ornament of the parks (Aliyeva 2017).

Both archaeological evidence (obtained via excavation) and historical documents demonstrate that Azerbaijani horses have a long and illustrious history. From the early ages, Azerbaijan was the source of a significant number of breeding stallions and mares that were sent to Russia, Iran, Arab nations, and European countries (agro.gov.az). Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union at the time, sent a Karabakh horse with the name 'Zaman' to Queen Elizabeth II in the year 1956. In recent years, the Karabakh horse 'Shohrat' was sent as a gift to Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. Other image-forming events, like as the presentation of the Karabakh horse to Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Palace, may also help to the branding of Shusha (<https://azertag.az/en/xeber/2136818>)

Open areas, like as parks and squares, are often utilized as focal points in city branding for a variety of purposes, including the staging of events and festivals, the installation of sculpture and other types of art and media, and more (Evans 2015). Shusha city was comprised of 17 different neighborhoods, each of which had at least one mosque, a spring, and a bathhouse for its residents. Panah Ali Khan entertained the idea of constructing a fortified castle in order to protect himself and the newly established khanate from external dangers, particularly those posed by the rulers of neighboring states, such as the khan of Ganja, the khan of Shaki, and the meliks of Karabakh. Panah Ali Khan's goal was to protect himself and the newly established khanate from external threats. Even though two fortresses were built in 1748 and 1752, he decided that these were not sufficient and powerful enough, so he gave the order to build a new one in Shusha in 1757. This new fortress was called Panahabad, and it gave its name to the coins that were minted there, which were called Panahabadi (Karakoc 2011).

There are many monuments in Shusha, including mosques. Govhar Agha Mosque is one of them. This mosque relates to the name of Govhar Agha (Govharnisa Beyim) (1790-1888), the daughter of Karabakh ruler Ibrahim Khalil Khan (1732-1806). That building reflected the features of the religious architectural composition widespread in Azerbaijan in the 16th-18th centuries. In 1865-1866, a religious complex known as Ashagi Govhar Agha Mosque was built in Shusha's Gapan Square with the funds of Govhar Agha. In 1884-1885, the construction of Juma Mosque (Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque <https://qarabag.com/the-most-ancient-mosque-of-shusha-yukhari-govhar-agma-mosque/>), which was founded by Panahali Khan (1769) was completed with his request and funds. Both mosques were built based on the project of architect Karbalayi Safikha from Karabakh and were complex (mosque, madrasa, library, residential house, garden, swimming pool, etc.) (Amirova 2022).

Despite this, Shusha has a significant amount of tourist potential because to its breath-taking landscapes, which include mountains, lakes, plains, and valleys, as well as an extensive historical and cultural legacy. It has been observed that cities with favorable factors (such as climate, location, and natural resources, for example) experience economic growth and effectively address urbanization and infrastructural issues. This is the case because these cities are better able to take advantage of their favorable factors (Fan 2006). It's common practice to identify famous and prosperous cities with tourism attractions, entertainment events, cultural festivals, and investment marketing opportunities (Rehan 2014). In terms of tourism, many different activities are organized in Shusha. Events such as Vagif Poetry Days and "Khari Bulbul" Festival are also held in Shusha. The organization of international music festivals and other creative events in Shusha and other liberated regions will give impetus to the development of alternative tourism.

Zedgenidze, who gave interesting information about Azerbaijani carpets, researched Shusha carpets (<https://medeniyyet.az/page/news/54936/Susa-yene-xalca-senetimizin-esas-merkezlerinden-biri-olacaq.html?lang=az>) and rugs and stated that Shusha took the first place in the Caucasus in terms of the number and quality of carpets and rugs. Many writers of that time refer to Azerbaijanis as Tatars and stated that "... almost the entire carpet industry of Shusha is concentrated in Tatar families" (Tagiyeva 1999).

According to Kunzmann's (2004) findings, it is certain that regional and municipal marketing and branding need to foster cultural advancement. In Shusha, new carpet varieties were produced. On a black backdrop, bouquets of flowers are painted in both vases and free form in the context of those instances. The carpet's

surface has been transformed into a tropical paradise by the realistically painted red and pink flowers (Aliyeva 2017).

In Karabakh, carpets with high pile and low density as well as less dense carpets with high pile were produced. While the latter were typical of mountainous places, the former were primarily characteristics of Shusha and the lowland industrial centers. Medallion, theme, and decorative carpets were produced in Karabakh. The most popular designs were 'Buynuz', 'Balyg', 'Darianur', 'Bakhchadagiullar', 'Sakhsyadagiullar', 'Khanlyg', 'Khantirme', 'Tasymushagy', 'Minakhani', and 'Bulut' (Tagiyeva, 2009).

The founder of the Shusha music school and influential mentor of many prominent singers, Kharrat Gulu (1823-1883), and Mir Mohsun Navvab (1833-1918), a musicologist, teacher, and possessor of extensive knowledge and skills, should be acknowledged. Mir Mohsun Navvab, together with Haji Husu created a music festival that trained singers. He also chaired the 'Maclis-i- Faramushan' (the Assembly of Forgotten People), which was an assembly of poets (Isaxanli 2021).

The song 'Mountains of Shusha' ('Şuşanın Dağları'), the exact history of which is little known, was created in the first half of the 20th century and is widely recognized as a folk song. Directly related to the name of the great Khan Shushinsky, this song reminds listeners of Shusha's "mountains, gardens, and its maiden's place," as well as the spring of İsa ('İsa bulağı'), and its evenings. The composition, written in the Segah style, belongs to Khan (Isaxanli 2021).

Firudin Shushinsky writes about the importance of məclis meetings in Shusha during the second half of the nineteenth century – gatherings for performers and poets that simultaneously functioned as schools for younger musicians. One of the first Shusha məclis traditions was founded by poetess Khurshidbanu Natavan in 1872. It was called 'Gathering for Discussion' ('Məclisi-üns') and was designed for musicians and composers of ghazals to join efforts and develop mugham. A renowned polymath Mir Mohsun Navvab – who was known as a poet, artist, musicologist, astronomer, chemist, mathematician, and hypnotist – also established 'The gathering of the forgotten' ('Məclisi-fəramuşan' – dedicated to classical art of the past) in Shusha. These 'Musical Gathering' ('Musiqi Məclisi') as Shushinsky (1979) calls them were different from religious or wedding gatherings that also featured mugham (Dessiatnitchenko, 2017).

Mugham occupies one of the most important places in Azerbaijani music. Mugham, on the other hand, has developed better in several regions of Azerbaijan and has become a school. One of them is the Karabakh mugham ecolodge, whose centre is the city of Shusha. Shusha and Baku, two cities that served as centers of mugham activity, were home to musicians whose innovations in the structure of the tar, instrumental performance technique, and khananda (xanəndə) art revolutionized mugham. Possibilities for creativity were broadened and the mugham system was augmented due to the new contexts for teaching and performing: the gathering (məclis) tradition, public concerts, and schools for religious singing. As a result, mugham was refined and differentiated, becoming an important representative of the nascent Azerbaijani identity. Both tar playing and khananda singing experienced breakthroughs at the end of the nineteenth century because of the innovations made by tar player (tarzən) Mirza Sadig Asadoglu and khananda Jabbar Garyagdioglu, who were from the city of Shusha (Dessiatnitchenko, 2017).

In the 19th century, the city of Shusha was home to a diverse population that included, among others: 95 poets, 22 musicologists, 58 singers, 12 copyists, 19 calligraphers, 16 sculptors, 8 architects, 5 astronomers, 16 physicians, up to 42 teachers, etc (Ahmadov, 2020). Particularly as a result of the efforts of Mugham performers, the history of Azerbaijani music has become more well-known. In the 19th century, the names of Sattarhan, Haji Husu, Mashadi İsi, Ali Asker Shirin, and Tarzen Mirza Sadkjan brought fame to the music of Azerbaijan. In the 20th century, Jabbar Karyagdioghlu, Mashadi Calil Amirov, and Seyid Shushinsky (from Shusha) along with a great number of other Mugham musicians brought fame to the music (Aliyeva 2017).

In the year 1832, Khurshudbanu Natavan was born into the family of the khan in the city of Shusha (Karabakh). Her paternal grandfather, Mehdigulu Khan Javanshir, is considered by many to be the last king of Karabakh. Her mother, Bedirjahan Beyim, was Ganja's monarch Javad khan's great granddaughter.

Uzeyir Hajibeyli, who is considered the founder of Azerbaijan opera, made a historical beginning for the Turkish world by staging the opera 'Leyla and Majnun' in 1908 despite some political and social difficulties. According to many sources, 'Leyla and Majnun' is described as the first opera not only of the Turkish world, but also of the Islamic world and the east. The great composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli was born in the city of Shusha in Azerbaijan, which was developed in the field of literature and music and called the 'natural conservatory'. He developed his existing talent here and built it on solid foundations (Türkmenoglu and Azizoglu 2021).

Famous singer Rashid Behbudov (1915-1989), the son of the singer Majid Behbudov from Shusha, was born in Tbilisi. The world-famous composer Fikrat Amirov (1922-1984) was born in Ganja into the family of

Mashadi Jamil Amirov, who was originally from Shusha. The composer Vasif Adigozalov (1935-2006) was the son of singer Zulfu Adigozalov from Shusha. The composer, singer, and diplomat Polad Bulbuloglu (1945) were the son of famous Bulbul from Shusha. Well-known pianist and music organizer Professor Farhad Badalbeyli (1947) was born in Baku into the family of the theatre director Shamsi Badalbeyli (1911-1987), who was also from Shusha (Isaxanlı 2021).

Surayya Aghaoglu, the daughter of Ahmad bey Aghaoglu, the founder of several public organizations in Turkey, was also born in 1903 in Shusha. The first president of the International Society of Women Lawyers, Surayya Aghaoglu, who studied at the Faculty of Law of Istanbul University, is Turkey's first female lawyer (Çetin 2021, Uslu 2022).

If it is necessary to summarize all these characteristic features of Shusha in accordance with the methodology, it is possible to identify brand elements under the dimensions in the literature about city branding of Shusha. The 4 basic elements that a city can use to become a brand are as follows (İlgüner 2006):

- Cultural heritage: All physical-tangible human-made things and all non-physical-intangible features inherited from past generations; traditions.
- Natural structure-environment: The natural attraction and the care shown to the environment.
- Original output: products grown specific to that region and products obtained from natural resources.
- Built-in skill: Skill based on history; work best done.

In another study, the features that make up the city identity are stated as follows (Hacıhasanoglu and Hacıhasanoglu 1995):

- Geographical features (Istanbul, with its strait; Venice, with its canals).
- Climatic characteristics (Mediterranean region gained identity with its temperate climate).
- Monuments (Istanbul, mosques; Paris, Eiffel Tower; Moscow, Kremlin Palace)
- City squares and streets (Venice, St. Mark's Square)
- Folkloric and sociocultural characteristics (Vienna is known for its waltzes; Rio is known for its carnival)

Based on the dimensions and appropriate features specified by İlgüner (2006) and Hacıhasanoglu and Hacıhasanoglu (1995), brand elements that can be evaluated for the city of Shusha were tried to be determined (Table 2).

Table 2. Examples of identity elements that can be evaluated within the scope of the branding of Shusha city

No	Dimensions	Features of Shusha	Sources
1.	Cultural heritage	▪ Handicrafts in Shusha's, all historical and architectural structures of Shusha.	İlgüner (2006)
2.	Natural structure-environment	▪ The hills called "Uchmikh" ("Uçmıx") consisting of three heights located behind each other on the western side of the city.	
3.	Original output	▪ Some stone graves, camp, and necropolis at the age of different ancient times.	
4.	Built-in skill	▪ Karabakh horses presented to Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.	
5.	Geographical features	▪ Panah Khan castle, Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque.	Hacıhasanoglu and Hacıhasanoglu (1995)
6.	Climatic characteristics	▪ The average temperature in Shusha ranges from -4°C to -1°C in January and relatively 16-19°C in July.	
7.	Monuments	▪ Shusha Castle, Khan's daughter Natevan's house, Karabakh Khan's palace, Vagif's tomb, Mirza Salah Bey Zohrabbeyov's residence.	
8.	City squares and streets	▪ Jidir plain (Cıdır düzü) located near the deep Dashalti (Daşaltı) valley on the outskirts of the city.	
9.	Folkloric and sociocultural characteristics	▪ Shusha is considered the musical center of the entire Caucasus, its role in the formation of the "mugham school" in Azerbaijan.	

Source: Authors own study

Diversification and further development of the non-oil industry in the future development period of the non-oil and gas sector, including increasing the production and export of competitive non-oil products, development of the agricultural sector and strengthening of food security, development of digital trade and expansion of service activities, tourism acceleration of the recovery has been identified as the main priority directions (Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2022). Therefore, the tourism sector is one of the main priority areas for

the development of the non-oil sector in Azerbaijan. Investments in tourism can be made for the development of the non-oil economy (Shekaraliyeva 2022, Huseynli 2022a).

### Discussion and Conclusion

According to Dinnie (2010), the most important factor in determining a city's long-term effectiveness is the construction and maintenance of a brand that accurately positions the city. According to Han, de Jong, Cui, Xu, Lu & Sun (2018), a successful city brand should be compatible with national and regional plans and policies and should be based on historical and cultural traditions. Azerbaijan began the process of rebuilding the Karabakh region's infrastructure and developing these regions after it emerged victorious in the military war that took place in the fall of 2020. The removal of mines and other explosive devices has recently gotten under start. The city of Shusha has once again been recognized as the cultural epicenter of Azerbaijan. Since we were finally able to get out from under the occupation, we have been planning a variety of infrastructure and restoration projects. Shusha is going to be another one of Azerbaijan's planned smart cities. The city of Shusha in Azerbaijan is considering implementing a waste management system that is dependent on advanced technologies.

The work done to develop a city brand is a significant investment in the future of the city and all of its residents, as well as that nation or city. In this regard, Shusha's most significant attributes are its carpet, music, natural resources, and architectural richness. Without a question, the carpet is a significant component of human civilization. The traditional carpet is the epitome of Azerbaijani culture, serving both practical and symbolic purposes. It is also a fundamental component of the cultures of many other peoples (Tagiyeva 2009).

The ideas of city marketing and city branding are somewhat causally related to one another. The most crucial element in building a city's brand is urban marketing activity, which has produced significant results after a lengthy process. In other words, for the city's brand value to increase, the city marketing process must be thoroughly completed (Dayanç Kiyat and Topal 2019).

It can be thought that the branding of Shusha city in Azerbaijan as a tourism destination center will also affect the country's tourism revenues and GDP. True, although we do not have data to test this hypothesis, there are results in the literature supporting this idea in different studies (Huseynli 2022b, 2023).

The study's conclusion that Shusha plays a strategic function is among its results. This strategic position is tied to Azerbaijan's heroism, culture, and strategic standing in the eyes of the Turkish community, as well as its historical and architectural buildings, natural geographic location, natural resources, and well-known figures it has fostered.

Shusha is one of the regions of our nation that is full of historic and distinctive architectural structures that honor the ancient history and rich culture of the Azerbaijani people. The city contained 549 historic structures before the conquest, 1203 meters of native stone-paved streets, 9 neighborhoods, 17 neighborhoods springs, 17 mosques, 6 caravansaries, 3 graves, 2 madrasahs, 2 castles, and fortress walls. In addition, Shusha contains 25 schools, 31 libraries, 20 hospitals, 17 clubs, 8 cultural houses, 4 technical schools, 2 institute branches, 7 kindergartens, 4 movie theatres, 5 parks for culture and leisure, 2 sanatoriums and tourist bases, 2 hotels, and Azerbaijan Carpet. The sole manufacturer of Oriental musical instruments in the Caucasus, as well as a branch of the State Museum, Shusha State Drama Theatre, Shusha Television, State Art Gallery, and Children's Health School, all operated in Shusha.

As a consequence of city marketing and branding initiatives, modern brand cities like New York, Paris, London, Rome, Tokyo, and Seoul have evolved into status symbols and brand aspects. Visiting and residing in these places are now seen as privileges. Based on this, Shusha will decide on its distinctive brand components and establish itself among other cities. The country's economy may benefit from the turning of Shusha, the spiritual centre of the Azerbaijani people, into a popular tourist attraction following branding efforts.

Paris represents love, Milan represents style, New York energy, Washington strength, Tokyo modernism, Lagos lawlessness, Barcelona culture, and Rio de Janeiro pleasure. These have taken on the identities of the cities and are intimately entwined with their histories and futures (Anholt 2006). The town of Shusha, often known as the 'cradle of Azerbaijani music', was included on the national register of historical and architectural reserves in the year 1977. There are studies of Shusha in the scientific literature that concentrate on its history, literature, and socio-political context; however, there are no studies that examine the city's marketing or branding strategies. The application for the historical center of Shusha to be placed on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List was first submitted in the year 2001. The research concluded that Shusha should be promoted as a city of art, culture, architecture, and courage. This was one of the conclusions of the study. As sources of inspiration for various components of the city brand, such things as horses from Karabakh, flowers from Kharibulbul (*Ophrys caucasica*), mugham, castles, and carpets should all be employed. These features have a

similar structure to the brand elements that should be considered when creating a city brand. These aspects of the brand should then be positioned correctly utilizing the right communication strategy. It is recommended that branding campaigns for the city of Shusha be carried out to attract cultural tourists, in the regions that have just been released from occupation.

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