The **Perception** of the Turkish **Students** of the **Study Destination** Budapest

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Abstract | Budapest is well known as a tourist destination, but it is also a study destination, attracting more and more international students each year. Destinations are important in tourism: their perceived image can influence the decision of travelers. The same is true for study destinations and educational tourism: the perceived image of a city and of a university among students influences whether a student prefers a given destination. In the current research we analyze the image of Budapest as a study destination: we show the opinion of 10 Turkish students of the city and analyze the motivations and experiences behind and connected to their chosen place of study. We will show that the international reputation of the universities in the city is just one factor influencing students: accessibility and social and cultural activities also play a decisive role in the decision of students to study in Budapest. Results also show that Budapest as an educational destination fulfilled the expectation of Turkish students.

Keywords | Educational tourism, study destination, Budapest, Turkish students

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1. Introduction

Destinations can be named as the most important notion when describing tourism products (Balaban, 2017). In the last decades destination preferences changed: as a result of globalization, consumers now can visit even farther destinations much easier than before. The pandemic also influenced and is still influencing traveling behavior, but destinations and destination image – although in an altered way – are still the most important factors for travelers (Kupi & Szemerédi, 2021).

Destinations should present their unique characteristics to the potential consumers to differentiate themselves in the global market (Qu, Kim, & Im 2010, cf. for a complex overview Morgan, Pritchard, Pride, 2004). Destinations with strong brand images eliminate the risk of substitution while attracting visitors (Pike, 2005). A good destination image also means a positive brand identity (Qu et al., 2010), and when tourists have positive associations for a brand, they are more likely to develop positive feeling towards a brand and recognize it among the competitors (Qu et al., 2010).

Destination image plays an important role in tourists' decision-making process as well (Chen & Tsai, 2007), for example positive referrals about a place can shape tourists' behavior before visiting a destination. During their visit positive experiences gained in a destination increase their satisfaction and create positive associations in their mind. After the visit, the associations are communicated while referring to the experiences at the destination or are used as anchors for planning another visit to the same destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Destinations should have a coherent brand image, if they want to take part in this competition. A strong and well-known destination helps tourists to reduce searching costs, minimize perceived risks, and indicates high quality (Blain et al., 2005). Branding of these tourism products needs to be handled by professionals since it is not an easy process and potential risks may occur such as damaging the current image (Morgan et al., 2004).

Destinations can be researched generally, or in a given, special context, for example analyzing one aspect of a destination bearing in mind the needs of a given target group. This study follows the second goal: it analyses the image of Budapest as an educational destination for Turkish university students.

Turkish students benefited from the reinforced relationship between Hungary and Turkey in recent years to a great extent. To meet this demand, the Hungarian Government provides scholarship opportunities for students from different countries including Turkey (Stipendium Hungaricum, 2022). In the academic year 2019/2020 36.090 students were studying in Hungary, of which 1080 were from Turkey (Oktatási Hivatal, 2020). According to the statistics, with this number Turkey is – behind Germany, China, Iran, Serbia, Romania and Slovakia – among the top 10 countries, from where students come to Hungary for studying purposes (Oktatási Hivatal, 2020). Based on the high number of Turkish students who studied or are still studying in Budapest, present study will focus on how Turkish students perceive Budapest as a student city: the research aims to explore the destination brand image of Budapest as a student city, through Turkish students' point of view.

In the first part of the paper an overview of different aspects of destinations and destination brand image is given, followed by an analysis of Hungary and Budapest as educational destinations. In the second part the results of a qualitative research are analyzed: we show which factors influence Turkish students to choose Budapest as a place for their university studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Destination concept

Destinations are perceived as amalgams that have compound structures and can offer diffe-

rent tourism products and services (Buhalis, 2000). They are also known as the most important brands of the tourism industry (Pike, 2005). In the literature, destinations are perceived as unique but complex notions, therefore different approaches to destinations exists. The most common definition of destination is "places where tourists travel and choose to stay beside their home, in order to experience certain activities or to see certain attractions" (Ryan & Cave, 2005, p. 143). Visitors tend to group destinations into "consideration", "inert" and "inept" sets in their mind (Um & Crompton, 1990, p. 434). If a certain destination is in the consideration set, it is recognized by the visitor, and even can be visited one day. If it is in the inert set, the destination is still recognized but there is no intention to visit in the short-term. Destinations which are in the inept set are also recognized by the visitors, but there is no intention to visit them at a specific time. If a destination is not known or recognized by the visitors, it means that it is in the "unawareness" set. Tourists are likely to select a destination if it is in the "consideration set" (Um & Crompton, 1990).

Destinations offer tangible and intangible assets to consumers (Qu et al., 2011). Tangible assets could include geographical attractions like beaches, lakes, historical sites, whereas intangible assets include culture, customs, and history (Qu et al., 2011). Consumers tend to create experiences through these assets which are in different geographical regions and are different from their home-country. Destinations located in different regions could offer unique values to the consumers.

2.2. Destination image

Destination image is considered important for the success and sustainability of a place. Therefore, scholars have been studying this concept since the 1970s to understand how destinations can differentiate their offerings. Cai (2002) descri-

bed destination image as the perception tourists have in their mind about a specific destination. Similarly, Baloglu and McCleary (1999, p. 870) define destination image as "the sum of an individual's knowledge, feelings and impression towards a destination".

There are numerous studies in the literature which were focused on identifying the components of a destinations image. Most of the scholars studied the concept through a multidimensional scale and focused on the cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & McClearly, 1999). The cognitive component refers the beliefs and knowledge of tourists, whereas the affective component refers the feelings and attachment of tourists towards a destination (Baloglu & McClearly, 1999). Even historical documents can shape and contribute to the image of a destination (Sampaio, Régio & Hernández Mogollón, 2021).

The destination image is considered as an important element in decision-making process and measuring the satisfaction level of tourists. Tourists' decision-making process can be evaluated in three phases: (1) pre-visitation, (2) during-visitation and (3) post-visitation (Chen & Funk, 2010). Hence, destination image can affect tourists' decision in all these phases, before the visit, during the visit and after the visit while referring this place to others or intention to re-visit the same destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

2.3. Destination brand

It is crucial for destinations to differentiate themselves in the market where many players exist. Ritchie and Ritchie (1998, p. 17) defined destination brand as "a name, symbol, logo or world mark that identifies and differentiates the destination, it represents the promise of a memorable travel experience which is associated with the destination and it reinforces consumers to recall their pleasurable memories". Destination brands consist of two

significant functions: identification and differentiation (Qu et al., 2011). Identification is considered as the unique offerings of a destination that contains material and non-material elements (Florek, 2005). Beside identification, destinations can ensure differentiation through their unique offerings. A distinctive brand creates competitive advantage for the brand, and it will not mix up with another brand (Qu et al., 2011). Thus, destinations with strong brand identities will be perceived as high-quality destinations, which will reduce the perceived risks and searching costs for consumers. Through effective branding, destinations can provide insights for the consumers about what to expect from that destination and how it will meet the expectations of the consumers. It is also likely that consumers will be paying more for a "premium destination brand", provided they have trust for that brand. As a result of trust the perceived risk will be relatively lower compared to other destinations (Blain et al., 2005).

Destination branding helps Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to create a unique brand, which can increase differentiation and decrease substitutability for the destination (Hristov, 2015). Both the "Hungarian Tourism Agency" and the "Istanbul Convention and Visitors Bureau" could be considered good examples for DMOs, who have been assisting in destination branding campaigns in Hungary and in Turkey.

2.4. Destination brand image

Destination brand image started to gain importance in tourism research in the 1980s. Since then, destination brand image has been described by numerous researchers and different definitions can be found in the literature. Keller described brand image as "the reflections which are shaped through the associations about a brand in consumer's mind" (Keller, 1993, p. 3).

Consumers tend to consider the emotional fea-tures beside the functionality of the product or destination during the decision-making process. Consumers evaluate the destinations based on their brand image and make their decision accordingly (Hankinson, 2005). Brand image can also be considered as a reflection of tourists' image based on their experiences in a destination (Qu et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be influenced by informal promotional tools such as "Word-of-Mouth" (WOM) or "Electronic-Word-of-Mouth" (e-WOM), as well as the formal marketing communication tools (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012). These tools help consumers to create mental pictures or perceptions which reflect consumers' mindset towards a destination (Manhas, Manrai, & Manrai, 2016).

According to a study conducted by Chi and Qu in 2008, the overall tourist satisfaction is directly influenced by destination image and attribute satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008). The underlying dimensions of destination image were defined as travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment and events, historic attractions, infrastructure, accessibility, relaxation, outdoor activities and price and value (Chi & Qu, 2008).

A strong brand image can help destinations to attract new visitors and increase tourists' intention to visit (Qu et al., 2011). A positive brand image helps destinations to differentiate themselves among competitors. Positive associations highlight a destination's attractiveness while negative associations indicate the risks that the destination carries (Quintal et al. 2014). Brand image can also influence brand loyalty, and destinations with positive brand images are likely to be chosen by consumers more frequently (Kim et al., 2018). A destination with a strong brand image and loyal consumers is expected to be more successful in the long run, even during the crisis period.

2.5. Student destinations

The decision making of students can be influ-

enced by several factors. Beech (2019) analyzes the process based on students' reports from the perspectives of geography, showing that student mobility and destination choices are connected to 1) policy geographies (how student mobility and student recruitment shape choices), to the 2) geographies of consumption (student as a consumer of education) 3) to geographies of connections (social interactions and networks of students) and 4) other geographical factors (e.g. the experiences collected after arriving in the destination country).

The reputation of universities is identified as a key factor by Wen & Hu (2018) in the case of China as a study destination, in the case of the United States (Nicholls, 2018) or Malaysia (Lee et al., 2017) as a destination.

Another perspective is related to the social contacts of students: Collins, Şimşek and Takır (2022) has shown that by choosing a student destination, social contacts between students play a role, but they also consider safety and university infrastructure as an important factor.

All in all, student's study destination decisions and considerations have different backgrounds and push and pull factors, including, but not limited to costs (Foster, 2014), their carrier goals (Anderson & Abhishek, 2012), or the culture they come from (cf. e.g. Ahmad & Hussain, 2015). For example, parents and students in China consider variuos factors, when considering studying abroad (Bodycott, 2009). The length of the abroad study also influences the decision process: short-term visits induce partly different consideration factors, as long-term studies (Kosmanczewska, 2020; Levation, 2022), and also external factors such as educational service agencies may influence the student decision (Bhati & Anderson, 2012).

In the next part we take a look at Budapest as a destination and a student destination.

2.6. Budapest as a destination

Budapest, also known as the "Pearl of the Danube" (Pérez Garrido et al, 2022), has been competing with several cities like Vienna, Warsaw, and Prague (Kavaratzis, 2009) for several years, which are all located in the same region. However, promoting the city as a cultural center in the Central-Eastern European region paid off (Kavaratzis, 2009), as the Hungarian capital was named the best destination in Europe in 2019 with competing other favorite European destinations like London, Paris and Barcelona (Pérez Garrido et al., 2022). What is more, the city was ranked second as the world's most affordable city on the "Best in Travel 2020" list (Pérez Garrido et al., 2022).

Budapest offers different attractions for every taste; it can address people with special interests especially through cultural tourism and gastronomy tourism. Cultural tourism is addressed to a broader audience than gastronomy tourism, while gastronomy tourism is considered as a small fragment of cultural tourism (Richards, 2018). As defined by Richards, cultural tourism is "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination" (Richards, 2018, p. 13). However, as Meneguel et al., (2019) indicated, Hall and Mitchell defined gastronomy tourism as "visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and local food tasting sites" (Meneguel et al., 2019, p. 221). For the complexity and components of food-related tourism see the example of olive-oil tourism in Portugal (Almeida & Silveira, 2021).

Along with cultural tourism, tourists prefer visiting Budapest for "party tourism" (ruin bar tourism) which was defined by Pérez Garrido et. al, as "an unconventional tourism product in an urban environment which was first developed for cultural, health, and conference tourists" (Pérez Garrido et al., 2022, p. 2). The ruin bar market in Budapest is well developed and was supported with the extensive Airbnb accommodation throughout the city (Pérez Garrido et al., 2022). Moreover, Hungary

is also known to be a traditional destination for shopping tourism, especially in the Central Eastern European region (Michalkó et al., 2014). Shopping tourists visit the country due to their utilitarian and leisure shopping motivations, which were accompanied usually with a shorter stay, mainly daily trips (Michalkó et al., 2014). Based on a study conducted by Michalkó et al. (2014), most of the visitors visiting Hungary for shopping tourism arrived from the neighboring countries due to the proximity between the originated countries and Hungary. It was observed that only a small percentage of shopping tourists arrived in Hungary tend to combine their shopping activities with other goals, such as tasting the local cuisine (Michalkó et al., 2014). There is multiple research on the examination of destination branding and image of Budapest, such as for example the paper of Puczko, Ratz and Smith (2007), "Old City, New Image: Perception, Positioning and Promotion of Budapest". Based on Puczko, Ratz and Smith's research, it was found that Budapest has an open image for tourists and their perceptions were enhanced in a good way after visiting the city (Puczko et al., 2007). In a more recent study conducted in 2017 with tourists belonging to the Generation Y, Coronel found that the city is perceived as accessible and affordable by the location, as well as historically and culturally rich (Coronel, 2017). It is however still underresearched, how the brand image of Budapest is perceived by international students – a target group different in characteristics form "normal" tourists.

2.7. Budapest as a student destination

Higher education in Hungary dates back to 650 years ago with the foundation of the first Hungarian university, which goes back to 1367 and was founded in Pécs (Lányi & Pozsgai, 2016). Signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and introducing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in 2002 can be considered the most important developments within the education system in Hungary (Pusztai & Dusa, 2016). To support the internationalization within the education system, the Hungarian Government offers several scholarship opportunities to the foreign students, one of which was highlighted by Lányi and Pozsgai as: "The Hungarian government recently launched a new scholarship program - called Stipendium Hungaricum - with the aim of increasing the number of foreign students" (Lányi & Pozsgai, 2016, p. 237).

Currently, there are 64 higher education institutions in Hungary: 6 of them are state-funded, 33 of them are private-funded and remaining 25 are church-funded, which altogether provide more than 500 courses in English, German, French and in other languages to its students (Higher Education in Hungary 2022; Tempus Közalapítvány, 2022). These offerings could be seen as the main reason of an increase in the number of international students, observed over the past decade. Based on a study conducted in 2014, it was observed that four neighboring countries of Hungary – Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine – were listed among the main sending countries of international students (Lányi & Pozsgai, 2016). When it comes to the non-European international student sending countries, Iran, Israel and Turkey were named as "the countries that send the largest number of students to Hungary" (Pusztai & Dusa, 2016, p. 69). As mentioned above, in 2019/2020 1080 Turkish students were studying in Hungary (Oktatási Hivatal, 2020). (As a side note, in the scope of the Erasmus Teacher Mobility Program, out-going instructors in Hungary could choose from 31 different countries, including Turkey (Pusztai & Dusa, 2016).)

To understand the underlying factors behind the students' decision-making process when it comes to choosing a place to study, a research was conducted by Lanyi and Pozsgai (2016). As per the first research which was conducted with the international student recruitment agencies, the main

decision-making factors for students for the Hungarian higher education were found as "the high-quality education, the reasonable tuition fees, the EU degree earned and reasonable living costs" (Lanyi & Pozsgai, 2016, p. 243). The second research, which was conducted with international students in Hungary, supported the first research with the main findings. The most important factor was indicated as education-related, mainly obtaining the EU degree, high quality of education and international reputation (Cf. Komlódiné Pozsgai, 2014). The education factor was followed by the cost of living, location, and university life. It was also found that low cost of living is more important for the students than the tuition fees demanded by the universities (Lanyi & Pozsgai, 2016). Regarding student life, as the most important factor safety was indicated (Lanyi & Pozsgai, 2016).

As we have seen, high quality education and cost of living were highlighted as key factors for choosing a study destination. According to U-Multirank (2021), which is a multidimensional, user-driven approach for ranking the higher education institutions on an international level by the students, Hungarian Higher Education institutions were found performing well in the categories "regional engagement", "international orientation" and "research" in 2021. The top five rated universities are according the users of the webpage were Semmelweis University, University of Debrecen, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME) and Corvinus University of Budapest. Additionally, Budapest was ranked as 136th safest city out of 442, based on a survey conducted for cross-country comparisons.

Based on Study in Hungary's "Cost of Living Calculator" (U-Multirank, 2021), students could calculate an average cost for a monthly living, which could be 266 euros in case they would like to live in a dormitory in Budapest or 331 euros if they would like to live in a shared flat. It is possible to use the public transportation for 11 euros for a month, or go to a movie, theatre, or concert

for 8 euros, while spending 125 euros/month on basic food and cooking. Compared to other European cities, Budapest could be considered as more student friendly in terms of cost of living. Please note, that these calculations on the homepage were made in 2021. Since early 2022 living costs may have increased by 10+ percent.

As described above, destination image and students needs and preferences must met to be able to function as a student destination. As seen above, Budapest can be defined as an ideal destination for students: facts show and research has shown that Budapest as a city and as a student destination can attract students from different countries. In most research however either the city itself, or students' needs in general are analyzed.

Open remains the question however, how a chosen, smaller groups of students perceive the city. To answer this question, the needs of an easy identifiable group of students must be analyzed with qualitative methods.

In current study we analyze the role of Budapest as a study destination for Turkish students. For the analysis we formulated following research questions:

RQ1: What are the main motivations for Turkish students to choose Hungary for university studies?

The goal is to compare the driving forces of the specific group with driving forces identified in literature: we want to show whether besides traditional student driving forces – as reputation (Collins et al., 2022), the geographical contexts of Beech (2019) and the cost (Foster 2014) – also other factors play a role for choosing Budapest as study destination.

The analysis could shed light on factors not largely discussed in literature, because in the analyzed setting (Turkish students in Budapest) there is one barrier, which aggravates student life: namely the language barrier. It means that Turkish students must consider by choosing Budapest as a student destination, that although their university

life is easily mastered using English, all other activities and aspects of everyday life will take place in a city, where they must assume that the communication may have obstacles and difficulties.

Our second research question is connected to the actual experiences of students while studying in Budapest:

RQ2: Do Turkish students studying in Budapest perceive the city as student-friendly?

The rationale behind the question is following: although most university cities claim to be student-friendly, such claims are based mostly on general or on specific, existing infrastructure and on possible student activities. We must note however, that these are promises: in some cases facts tell a different story. Thus, the friendliness of a city must be actually experienced during the stay in the city. Our second question is connected to this fact: we collect the experiences of Turkish students during they study in Budapest and evaluate them in light of literature and also in light of their previous expectations.

3. Methodology

The research aims to understand the destination brand image of Budapest as a student city, through Turkish students' point of view. To achieve this goal, in-depth interviews with Turkish students were conducted. In-depth interviews can be defined as "a conversation between a researcher and a participant, which focuses on the participants' reflections on an experience" (Beale et al., 2004, p. 141), and the participant is encouraged to speak freely with his/her own words.

3.1. Sampling

The subjects of the study are Turkish people, who either studied or are still studying in Buda-

pest: that is former or current university students. A purposive sampling method was adapted based on one author's (E.B.) personal connections in Budapest. A list of 15 students was created, and the subjects were thereafter contacted via phone to explain the purpose of the study and to ask for their participation. 10 students agreed to participate in the study, therefore at the end a total of 10 interviews were conducted. All participants lived in Budapest for at least a year during their studying period. Additional information regarding the profiles of the interview participants will be displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1 | Profile of the participants

No	Gender	Age	Program studied	University
BP-P1	M	30	Bachelor, Master's, and Doctoral Degree	Liszt Ferenc Music Academy
BP-P2	F	25	Master's and Doctoral Degree	Corvinus University of Budapest
BP-P3	F	25	Master's degree	Corvinus University of Budapest
BP-P4	M	27	Master's degree	Corvinus University of Budapest
BP-P5	M	27	Master's degree	Corvinus University of Budapest
BP-P6	F	26	Master's degree	International Business School
BP-P7	M	27	Master's degree	Central European University
BP-P8	M	26	Master's degree	Budapest University of Technology and Economics
BP-P9	F	25	Master's degree	Corvinus University of Budapest
BP-P10	F	29	Master's degree	Corvinus University of Budapest

As it can be seen, of the total 10 respondents, there was an even split in terms of gender, as 5 respondents were female, and 5 respondents were male. All the respondents are Turkish with the age range between 25 to 30. 8 respondents are currently studying their degree, while the remaining 2 already graduated. More than half of the respondents (6) were from the Corvinus University of Budapest and 8 respondents indicated they came Budapest for studying their master's degree.

3.2. Data collecting

Face-to-face interviews (n=6), and phone interviews (n=4) were carried out based on the

participants' availability. A structured interview method was followed and the interview questions were predetermined. Open ended questions were asked to understand the participant's knowledge prior moving to Budapest as well as the opinions after their studies, such as: *"Did you have any information regarding the universities in Budapest prior your arrival?", "How did the international recognition of universities in Budapest affect your choice?"* and *"Do you find Budapest safe for students?"*. A total of 10 questions were asked during the interviews, and the interviews were conducted in Turkish as this is the mother-tongue for both the interviewer and the interviewees. The implementation process started on 16th November 2021 and ended on 30th November 2021. Phone interviews were recorded while conducting and transcribed later. Face-to-face interviews were recorded through writing simultaneously. Each interview lasted between 25 and 40 minutes.

3.3. Data analysis

The data was analyzed through a thematic analysis. The reason for choosing this method was "to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes within the collected data" (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 400). After conducting the interviews, the collected data was transcribed and this step was followed with reading the transcribed data until it was familiarized. After being familiarized with the data, initial codes were generated which helped to define the common topics behind the data.

There was no software used during the coding, one of the authors (E.B.) conducted the process manually using an inductive approach. Initial codes were determined (35) such as: "University", "Environment" and similar codes were grouped together to form the themes.

The following 3 main topics were identified:

1) International reputation of Budapest as a student destination

2) Accessibility of Budapest: Geographical location and living costs

3) Social and cultural activities

These topics will be discussed in the results section in detail.

Open ended questions were prepared and used in the interviews to support the qualitative research. In addition, the investigator triangulation method was adapted to eliminate the researcher's bias during the interpretation process. Afterwards two independent evaluators analyzed the interviews and confirmed the coding to support the validity of the research.

4. Results

4.1. Initial analysis of student life in Budapest

According to the initial analysis, the authors of this study asked the participants what comes to their mind when they think about their student life in Budapest; thus, a free association test was conducted (Kovács, 2019). The most common responses included reputation, location and culture which were highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 | Participants' perceptions about Student Life in Budapest

The association analysis did not provide a deep inside into motivations, it was rather used to give a quick overview of the destination brand related top-of-mind associations.

4.2. International reputation of Budapest as a student destination

Students coming to Budapest for study purposes can be split into different groups according to the level of programs such as: bachelor degree, master's degree or doctoral degree. However, regardless the program they are studying, what can be considered important for all levels is the "international reputation" of the university and whether it is recognizable or not, because students who want to build strong careers consider the reputation of the university they want to study at.

Two questions in the interview directly asked the participants' opinion about the universities in Budapest and about international students in the city. Below some comments from the interviews which reflect to the importance of reputation:

> "One of the main reasons I chose Budapest was because of the good reputation of the universities. I know that the universities in Hungary are well-known and preferred by many international students. There are different programs in reputable universities, and I heard that the teachers are also good. The universities are recognized in the academia which is good because I am doing my doctoral degree now here" [BP-P2, female; all answers translated to English by E. B.].
> "I came to study here with one of my good friends and she did a lot of research about the universities and programs. She was the one telling me about the reputation of universities here and that is one of the main reasons I decided to come here. Because the reputation is important" [BP-P4, male].

> "I did a lot of research prior coming to Budapest, and I heard many good things about the quality of education and teachers, of course other things are also important to make a decision, but I think reputation is more important, at least for me" [BP-P3, female].

As it was indicated above, the reputation of these universities can be one of the key elements for the high number of international students in Budapest. In fact, students are also aware of the reputation before they came to Budapest, because former, current and future students interact with each other via various channels. The comments regarding international students can be found below:

> "Budapest attracts many international students, I know that because every time I go out, I meet someone who is studying in Budapest, and this is how we grow our network. There are many students like us and we share and help each other, especially with the Turkish ones. I met and now good friends with some Turkish girls we help each other all the time. And there are many more from Germany, France, Spain" [BP-P10, female].
> "My case was a little bit different; I studied a semester here in high school and started to learn Hungarian, then came to study my bachelor degree in Hungarian. That is how I met with my good friends who were studying with me in Hungarian, they were from Moldova, Italy, and Hungary. So, we were very international" [BP-P1, male].

Throughout the analysis, "international reputation" of the universities in Budapest was considered the most important driving force by the participants, as it was mentioned by all the participants when their initial motivation was asked for. Overall, "international reputation" became the most frequently mentioned term, as it appeared in every

interview transcription.

This initial motivation was supported by secondary or tertiary motivations such as accessibility and social or cultural activities (see point 4.3 and 4.4.).

4.3. Accessibility of Budapest: Geographical location and living costs

Hungary is situated in Central Eastern Europe, where Western Europe meets the Eastern and Budapest located in the center of Hungary. Due to this accessibility, most students from eastern countries see Hungary as a gate opening to the west — also connected to the fact, that Hungary is part of the European Union. This is especially important for students coming from a third-nation country.

Studying in Hungary, especially in Budapest, is perceived as a great opportunity for young students who can also find the opportunity to travel around Europe while studying. In the interview, three questions were used to elaborate these concepts through the participants' point of view. The accessibility of Hungary was explained by the students in the comments below:

> "I really wanted to come and study in Hungary, because most importantly it is in Europe and included in the Schengen area, I have not had the opportunity to go on an exchange program while studying my bachelor degree so that is the reason why I wanted to go abroad for my masters and have the experience as much as I can including traveling the Europe" [BP-P5, male].
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> "I choose Hungary because I studied my Erasmus Program in Hungary. And my main motivation for that because it was very close to Turkey and to the other European countries. It was my first time going abroad and stepping out of my comfort zone, I really enjoyed the time I spent. Now I am doing my master's de-

gree here and I could not think a better place than Hungary to study" [BP-P9, female].

Even though Hungary is part of the Schengen area, it is not in the Euro Zone which means the currency used in Hungary is not Euro but Hungarian Forints. The currency makes Hungary even more attractive for the students, because in majority of the cases students try to make a living according to their own budget. There are exceptions like scholarship holders, however they do need an additional pocket money as the scholarships usually do not cover the cost of living. Therefore, most of the students find it more affordable to live in Hungary compared to the other European countries. The affordability of living in Hungary were explained in the below comments:

> "Of course, cost of living was important for me and for my parents, they are supporting me currently but because of the highly changing situation of economy in Turkey, I did not want to choose a country that uses euro because when I convert it to Turkish Lira it will be a lot" [BP-P6, female].
>
> "I think it is very good for students to live in Hungary because it is more affordable, especially if you do not work as part-time or intern, it means you do not earn extra but we still need additional money for rent, for eat and etc. and compared to the other places it is much better here" [BP-P7, male].

While analyzing the collected data, "economical and geographical accessibility" of Hungary came out as the second most important feature by the participants, as all the participants mentioned at least either one of these features. "Accessibility" was found the second most important motivation among the participants which came after the international reputation.

4.4. Social and Cultural Activities

Budapest offers hidden gems both for cultural and gastronomy enthusiasts around the city, where tourists can experience the city like a local. As students come to Budapest for longer periods compared to the tourists, they usually can explore the culture and heritage. Beside culture and language, students have more experience with the social and recreational activities in the city, as well as the other facilities including transportation. The wide range of offerings in Budapest were expressed through the below comments by the students:

> "Before coming to Budapest I know that there will be many things to learn, but I was not aware of this richness of the culture especially the food culture. One of my favorite things in Budapest includes my food experiences. I love Hungarian food and trying to learn but it is also as difficult as the language" [BP-P9, female].

> "I must say, my university was very active during the time I studied in Hungary, and almost every week there were some gatherings for foreign students mainly to explore the culture. I think it is like Turkish culture, that can be the reason why I felt like home, safe and was protective towards the city. Sometimes when I see tourists screaming and shouting at night, I felt bad and annoyed, it is a beautiful city but sometimes there are so many tourists" [BP-P7, male].

> "I arrived in Budapest last year and I was very surprised by two things, the first was the food it was very tasty, and the second thing was the transportation, especially the trams, we can use it for 24 hours and it was one of the greatest things. It was very well thought that even during holiday times, the tram never stops. I feel safe all the time and I also enjoyed a lot with my friends there are so many attractions including ruin bars" [BP-P8, male].

> "Before coming to Budapest I heard from my friends that the culture is somehow like Turkish, and when I arrived, I did not feel like a tourist, as if I have been living here. I adapted easily and did not feel alone, especially for girls I think it is a very safe city. And now it is like my home, that is why sometimes tourists can be too many and everywhere" [BP-P2, female].

Compared to the "international reputation" and "accessibility", "social and cultural activities" was found the third most important motivation among the participants, as it was mentioned by half of the group. Therefore, it was considered as the tertiary motivation among the participants and found less important than the first two underlying factors.

4.5. Expectations and experiences

"International reputation", "Accessibility" and "Social and cultural activities" were found the most important motivators among the participants of the study.

Beside these factors, almost all the participants indicated their intention to stay in Hungary after completing their studies. To guarantee their stay after graduation, students tend to work during their study period either part-time or as interns. Within the sample of this study, 8 participants indicated they are currently working along their studies. None of the participants indicated any negative experiences so far, hence they were quite satisfied and considering staying and living in Hungary for a longer period.

All participants also indicated, that prior coming to Hungary they were collecting information from their peers who either lived in Hungary while working or have studied in Hungary for some time. However, word-of-mouth was not their only source when it comes to collecting information regarding living in Hungary. The participants also indicated that they were using social media channels to

contact with expats living in Hungary and to find answers to their questions. All participants stated that they were pretty satisfied during their study period in Hungary and that they are willing to share their own experiences with potential students.

Furthermore, all participants decided to come to Budapest for study purposes as they indicated, they all perceived Budapest as *"easy to live in, especially for students"*. They also associated the city in their mind with *"freedom, as the city is not chaotic"*, therefore their perception towards the city helped them to decide, prior coming to Budapest.

Considering the participants origin, 8 of them are from Ankara (the capital of Turkey, with a population of 5,7 million based on 2021 data) and 2 of them are from Izmir (the third biggest city in Turkey, with a population of 4,4 million based on 2021 data). Their origin also could help us to understand why they perceive the city "chaos free" and happy to live in. This could be explained through the number of students living in Budapest, as many international and local students could be found in the city, this might be the reason why they consider the city as "student-friendly".

Two participants indicated they have already started their second degree, two other participants have applied for their second degree in Budapest, and one participant who already has a master degree decided to come to Budapest for her second master degree. This could be summarized for half of the sample, that Budapest is seen as an important destination to study as they have decided to come to Budapest specifically. This also shows that the experiences are met: students are willing to remain in Budapest longer as initially planned and as the study requires.

The remaining three participants could imagine doing another degree in Budapest but currently they are focusing on finishing their current degree. The remaining two participants do not consider having another degree and they started their professional life already in different sectors. These

two participants have already graduated in Budapest, one of them has already returned to Turkey, whereas the other one is working in Hungary.

5. Discussion

The current study offers insight into the perceived brand image of Budapest through Turkish students' point of view. Budapest has been gaining popularity among Turkish students in the last years with the scholarship opportunities offered by the Hungarian Government. Every year there is a huge demand from the applicants for this scholarship program who want to study in Hungary, mainly in Budapest. To understand the main motivation behind of this demand, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Turkish people who studied or are studying in Budapest. Connected to the first research questions (RQ1) – What are the main motivation for Turkish students to choose Hungary for university studies? – we showed that besides international reputation, accessibility, and social and cultural activities are the main factors attracting students to Budapest.

Results are in line with literature: with accessibility we confirm reputation (Collins et al., 2022) and the geographical contexts of Beech (2019) and the cost context of Foster (2014).

The findings correspond also with the findings of other authors: "unique culture and quality of academic practice" were identified as significant motivation factors by Kondakci (2011, p. 587) and "culture, quality of life and living expenses in the host country, reputation and quality of education" were highlighted by Abubakar et al. (2014, pp. 60-61). In addition to these, Ma (2021, p. 11) argued that "university reputation and city image" both could be considered important during international students' decision-making process. Leão (2022) pointed out, that also the built environment in a university city can contribute to the attracti-

veness of a city.

Other motivations such as weather or employment opportunities were mentioned, however they were not in the focus in most of the interviews. Destination image also had a positive effect on destination loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008), which can be analyzed further to see if any of the participants come back to Budapest for leisure purposes.

The second research question (RQ2): is connected to the actual experiences of students: Do Turkish students studying in Budapest perceive the city as student-friendly?

According to our analysis, Turkish students, who came to study in Budapest indicated their special interest in food and culture related experiences during their study period. They have also indicated an existence of similarity and felt connection between Turkish and Hungarian culture. The study thus supported the idea of Wei-Jue, Chun-Chu and Yueh-Hsiu (2013), that "cultural proximity" is found as an important predictor when analyzing the relationship between destination image and further re-visit intentions. The fulfillment of these "cultural connection expectations" of the students led to satisfaction in the end. As indicated by Kastenholz (2010, pp. 319-320) "cultural proximity has an impact on the image" and "culturally closer tourists could be the easiest to satisfy". Interestingly language as an issue /

problematic field was not mentioned by any of the students, even though both Hungarian and Turkish are languages spoken only in the respective countries as official languages.

As described, most respondents decided to stay in Hungary for a longer time. Apart from the sample, the authors know, that it is common for Turkish students studying in Hungary to stay longer in Hungary: they start new studies (e.g. PhD studies after MA studies) or they decide to start their professional life in Hungary. This is due to the positive experiences they collect during their stay.

Based on the results we offer the following model, which connects students' expectations, experiences and evaluations and is based on the interviews. This interconnectedness is in line with literature: as Rodríguez del Bosque show that meeting expectations can led to consumer loyalty (Rodríguez del Bosque, San Martin, & Collado, 2006; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011), and as it has been shown, travelers anticipate, experience and evaluate experiences in tourism (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Sie, Patterson, & Pegg, 2015). The model can be seen as an overly simplified model of the complex model of Cutler and Carmichael (2010). A simplification is needed, because based on the results not all slots of the original model could be filled in with actual data from the research.
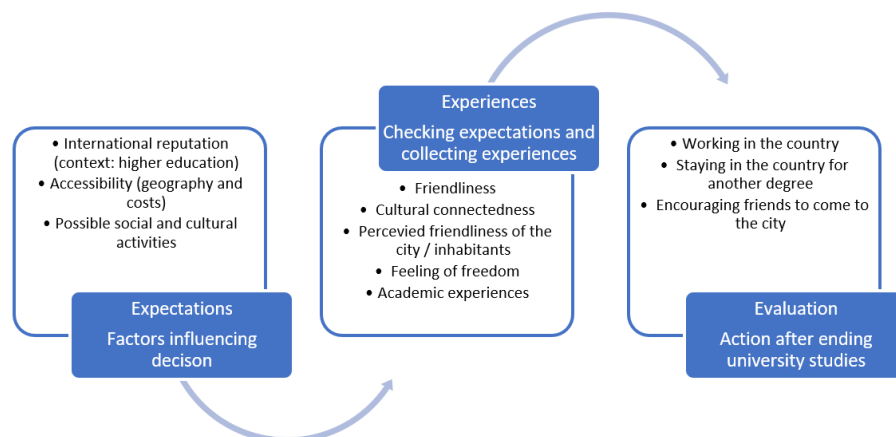
Figure 2 | The interconnectedness of expectations, experiences and evaluations of Budapest from the viewpoint of Turkish university students

5.1. Implications

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the current study has several managerial implications as well as a theoretical implication.

The managerial implications can be used by the destination marketers both in Hungary and Turkey.

First, Budapest could be advertised more as a student city in Turkey, since there is already an existing demand. Universities in Budapest and other cities of Hungary should be engaged more in advertising in Turkey, mainly in Turkish universities, as the experiences of students studying or already studied in Hungary shows that the expectations of the students can be met on site both regarding the higher educational experience and Budapest as a student city.

Based on our research keywords such as high quality of education, accessibility, low(er) living costs, safety, cultural similarity and a wide range of social and cultural programs could be used for advertisements.

Second, Turkish students who are studying and staying in Hungary after graduation could provide valuable insight with their experiences into Turkish culture. These students could function as "student ambassadors" for Turkey and introduce their country while living in Hungary. This will help them to contribute a positive image of Turkey in Hungary and among Hungarians.

Third, Turkish universities could benefit from the contacts or former contacts of Turkish students built in Hungary: through these contacts, both countries could utilize a much more active knowledge exchange between students and professors.

Fourth, we must know that not only universities benefit from opportunities provided by cities: as Leão and Marques (2021) point out, universities also shape the identity of cities. Therefore, the process is an iterative one: city image, the image of universities and the experiences of students all shape each other.

As a theoretical implication, the study also includes an adaptation of Cutler and Carmichael's (2010) model based on the research results. The simplified model presents how expectations, experiences and evaluations of Turkish students studying in Budapest are interrelated. This model can be considered as the theoretical contribution of the study and can be adapted as a simple evaluation tool to other similar study destinations.

5.2. Limitations and further research

For the future, more students can be included into the analysis since every year approximately 250 Turkish students come to Hungary and this number does not include self-funded students. Therefore, the sample could be increased, and new methods could be used such as focus groups or content analysis of the student groups social media posts to support these results.

The possible interaction with locals was not analyzed in current research but this aspect can be evaluated in a further study to see how it effects the whole brand image, especially because some respondents indicated they feel like at home in Budapest. It should be interesting to learn whether this feeling has any linkage to the contact to locals.

6. Conclusion

This study offers an insight into the destination brand image of Budapest as a student city, through Turkish students' point of view. After the analysis of related literature, the authors of the present research conducted in-depth interviews with students who studied or are studying in Budapest. The goal of these interviews was to understand the perceived brand image of Budapest. It is shown through qualitative interviews that students have several motivations prior coming to Bu-

dapest, including the international reputation of the universities, economy and social, cultural activities offered in the city. Therefore, compared to the tourists visiting Budapest, students have different motives behind their decision. As indicated by most of them, they lived for a longer period, at least one year, which helped them to explore the culture in depth. It was also indicated that after living for a certain time, they started to feel like home and were protective about the city. This can be seen as the most important difference between tourists and students who came to Budapest.

Regarding the results of above-mentioned interviews, even though their main purpose was studying, Budapest can still address various expectations of students. Gastronomy and culture were mentioned mostly by the participants, and it was indicated by several participants that they felt attached to the culture after living in Budapest. According to the results of this research, Turkish students mostly choose Budapest due to the location, proximity to the other countries, affordability, education quality and friendliness of the other international people studying in Budapest.

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