

The Importance of Cultural Heritage in Branding Amasya and Some Suggestions: A Preliminary Study*

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Abstract

Every tangible and intangible value that has developed throughout time in connection with a society's shared identity, culture, and history can be referred to as its cultural heritage. Cultural heritage can be used to assess the history of cities, cultural buildings, archeological sites, buildings, language, customs, traditions, local dances, and other comparable assets. The intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage greatly depends on increasing public awareness and cultural awareness. In order to achieve the appropriate level of awareness and consciousness, marketing, advertising, and education initiatives should be prioritized. International and national bodies (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, etc.) encourage and closely monitor these studies.

The competition between cities for a greater economic share is intensifying due to globalization. Because of this, cities that are able to assume responsibility for one another, concentrate on advancements in sectors like the economy, trade, and tourism, and swiftly execute their own policies are growing, while other cities are continuing to contract. Cities may brand themselves if they understand their own potential, are able to effectively promote it, and are appealing to tourists. Numerous civilizations have called the Central Black Sea region home, including the Hittites, Phrygians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, and Ottomans. The city of Amasya has a wealth of possibilities in terms of cultural heritage because of this historical depth.

The study's goal is to shed light on how Amasya's cultural diversity may be promoted both domestically and abroad, since this will help with the region's branding. This study is a preliminary investigation that will make use of secondary data sources. The study includes significant findings and recommendations because it has never been thoroughly examined for Amasya. It will serve as a valuable resource for practitioners in the tourism industry and the pertinent literature in this regard.

Keywords: Branding, Cultural Heritage, Tourism

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Introduction

Looking at TURKSTAT tourism data for 2024; "Tourism revenue increased by 8.3% in 2024 compared to the previous year and reached 61 billion 103 million 419 thousand dollars. Tourism revenue from visitors was 60 billion 497 million 18 thousand dollars and tourism revenue from transfer passengers was 606 million 401 thousand dollars. Non-resident citizens visiting Turkey accounted for 17% of tourism revenues from visitors. While "sightseeing, entertainment, sportive and cultural activities" ranked first with 64.9% in terms of the purpose of arrival of visitors annually, citizens residing abroad came to our country mostly for "visiting relatives and friends" with 69.6%" (TÜİK, 2025).

In Amasya, the subject of our study, 406,817 tourists visited museums and archaeological sites in 9 months of the year, 11,972 of which were foreign tourists. Compared to 2023, the number of foreign tourists increased by 41 percent. Again in this period, 279 thousand 77 people stayed in touristic facilities. While 16 thousand 212 of these were foreign tourists, the number of foreign guests increased by 11 percent compared to 2023. The interest of foreign tourists in Amasya increased in 2024 and guests from 107 countries were hosted this year (NTV Life, 2024).

When we look at the cultural values in Amasya, as museums and ruins; Amasya Museum, Saraydüzü Barracks Building, Hazeranlar Mansion, Amasya Castle, Martyrs Museum, King Rock Tombs, Sabuncuoğlu Medicine and Surgery Museum, Imaret Cultural Center, Şeyh Hamdullah Calligraphy Museum, Ferhat and Şirin Lovers Museum etc. There are places. As historical buildings, there are Sultan Beyazid II Complex, Burmalı Minaret Mosque, Gökmedrese Mosque, Gümüşlü Mosque, Bimarhane, Merzifon Taşhan, Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Bedesten and Clock Tower, Küçük Ağa and Büyük Ağa madrasas, Gümüşhacıköy Bedesten, Yalı Boyu Houses etc. historical buildings. Within the scope of thermal tourism; Terziköy Thermal Springs, Gözlek Thermal Hotel and Hamamözü Thermal Hotel are available. As nature tourism; there are places such as Borabay Lake, Yedikır Dam Lake and Yedikuğular Bird Sanctuary. Although Amasya has many cultural values, we will only be able to discuss some of them in this study (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

When the definition of the concept of Cultural Heritage is examined, it is seen that it is defined as "the whole of values belonging to a society with all kinds of works physically existing and made by people, inherited from the past and desired to be bequeathed to the future for different reasons" (Can, 2009). In order for cultural heritage to gain meaning, it is very important to transfer it to future generations. For this purpose, educational and promotional activities that increase cultural consciousness and awareness gain importance. In addition, such educational and promotional activities are encouraged and supported by many national and international organizations (Halaç & Badem, 2021: 173).

The aim of this study is to raise awareness, contribute to the branding of the city and determine the strategies to be followed for branding by increasing both national and international awareness of Amasya, an ancient city that has hosted many cultural values, has hosted historical civilizations, has abundant cultural diversity and increases the number of visitors every day. When previous studies are examined, it is seen that there are very few studies on the contribution of Amasya's cultural values to the branding of the city. Therefore, it is considered that this study will contribute to the literature.

Importance of Cultural Heritage for Branding

Deniz and Savaşkan (2018) define cultural heritage as the material or immaterial resources, ideas, and phenomena that exist in different communities and that date back thousands of years. Both moveable and immovable cultural assets are used to describe these cultural values. The preservation of these cultural legacies is crucial for the growth and sustainability of cultural tourism, particularly in the age of universality.

A community or society's identity, history, and customs are reflected in both tangible and intangible components, which are conserved, protected, and promoted as part of the complex process of cultural heritage preservation (UNESCO, 2012).

Furthermore, Timothy and Boyd (2015) assert that the preservation of cultural heritage is essential to the development of destination branding and identity, which in turn affects the opinions and preferences of travelers. According to Poria, Butler, and Airey (2013), locations can set themselves apart from rivals and develop captivating stories that appeal to travelers by protecting and promoting cultural heritage assets. This will improve the travelers' overall trip experience. In this context, Anatolian geography, which is regarded as the cradle of civilizations and frequently draws tourists looking for unusual and genuine experiences, includes significant heritage values like the ancient city of Ephesus in Izmir, the Hittite capital of Hattuşa (Boğazköy), and the King Rock Tombs (Amasya).

Cultural Heritage Potential In Amasya

Amasya, known as the city of sheikhs, is geographically located in the central black sea region of Türkiye. It has hosted many civilizations throughout history, especially the ottoman civilization. It has been the economic, cultural, industrial, trade and art center of the region for many years and is still of great importance today. Amasya and its surroundings are an ancient city that hosts historical structures, religious centers and palace cuisine culture. In this context, some of the cultural heritage values that stand out are listed below.

Sultan Bayezid Mosque

It was built by Shahzadah Ahmet among 1485-1486, by order of the Ottoman Sultan II. Bayezid. When the complex was first built; the building, known as the

imaret consists of five separate units: mut'ime-hane (dining hall), matbah (kitchen), cellar, oven and barn. The mosque, madrasah and soup kitchen have survived to the present day (see Image 1). There is also a muvakkithane (temporary home) and a fountain built in the 19th century. The tomb belonging to Shahzadah Osman, the son of Shahzadah Ahmet, who died at a young age, was added to the structure later. There is also a muvakkithane and a fountain built in the 19th century. The mosque is one of the most beautiful examples of side space or zaviye architecture. The building consists of two square spaces separated by a large arch in the middle and three domes on each of the east-west sides.

The mosque is one of the most beautiful examples of side space or zaviye architecture. The building consists of two square spaces separated by a large arch in the middle and three domes on each of the east-west sides. The inside of the dome and the top of the window arches are decorated with rich hand-drawn works. Window sashes are among the best examples of the 15th century wooden künde-kâri technique. The narthex in the north is covered with domes supported by five pointed arches resting on six round marble columns. The window tops in the narthex are decorated with blue and white tile panels.

Of the two minarets with a single balcony rising at both ends of this place, the body of the one on the left is vertically grooved, and the body of the one on the right is decorated with zigzag stone. The plane trees on both sides of the fountain planted during the construction of the mosque have given their shade to the mosque garden for over 500 years (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025; Pala and Daşkin, 2021).



Image 1. A view from the Mosque (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism Archive).

Amasya Museum

It is possible to see the works of many civilizations from the Late Neolithic Early Chalcolithic Age to the Bronze Age, Hittite, Urartu, Phrygian, Scythian-Cimmerian, Persian, Pontus, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman periods together. The most interesting place of the museum is the section where mummies belonging to the people who served as ministers and emirs in Amasya during the Anatolian domination of the Ilkhanate and their relatives. In addition, the Apple Mosaic from the Roman Period, which is in the collection of the Amasya Museum, is one of the rare examples in its group of works. The apple tree on this mosaic shows us that the apple was an important fruit 1700 years ago in Amasya, which is identified with the famous muscat apple (see Image 2) (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025; Pala and Daşkın, 2021).



Image 2. A view from Museum (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism Archive).

Yalıboyu Houses

Yalıboyu Houses, which are single- or two-story buildings with adobe-filled wooden frames, are situated on the banks of the Yeşilırmak River on the old city wall in the city center. They have all the features of Ottoman civil architecture. There is always a water well and a stove in the courtyards of the homes, which typically feature gardens and courtyards (see image 3). The houses' second floors typically have bay windows and protrude (Orta Karadeniz Kalkınma Ajansı, 2025).



Image 3. A view from Amasya Yalıboylu houses (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism Archive).

Bimarhane

The Ilkhanate Sultan Muhammad Olcaytu and his wife Ildus Hatun had it constructed in 1308–1309. With its rectangular layout, open courtyard, iwans, and classic Seljuk madrasah design, it is a medical madrasah. Its crown door entrance embellishments have earned it notoriety (see image 4). In addition to providing education, this location also treated patients, demonstrated surgical procedures to students, served as a site for hands-on learning, and eventually evolved into a mental health treatment facility. It is regarded as the first hospital in Anatolia to use music therapy (Orta Karadeniz Kalkınma Ajansı, 2025).



Image 4. A view from Bimarhane (Halaç et al. 2022:12).

The Shahzadah Museum

One of the most crucial locations where the Princes were dispatched as Governors or Sanjak Beys to teach the sultans who would lead the Ottoman Empire was Amasya, which fell under Ottoman control in 1389. The Princes' Museum, a two-story wooden structure situated on the old city walls on the banks of the Yeşilirmak River, has wax statues of the most well-known Ottoman sultans who were rulers of Amasya (see image 5). Effective artistic elements from the roughly 150 years that the sultans lived are incorporated into the museum's interior design (Orta Karadeniz Kalkınma Ajansı, 2025).



Image 5. A view from Sehzadeler museum (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism Archive).

Büyük Ağa Madrasah

Hüseyin Ağa, the Gate Ağa of Sultan Bayezid II, constructed the Büyük Ağa Madrasah in 1488. Its design is different from that of the traditional Ottoman madrasah. This madrasah was the first to use the octagonal plan design, which is particularly common in Seljuk tomb monuments (see image 6). High-quality education was offered in Amasya at the madrasah. This madrasah, which belongs to the Sixties Madrasah group, had a number of scholars as teachers, the most famous of them was Taşköprülüzade Mustafa Müslihiddin Efendi (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).



Image 6. A view from Büyük Ağa Madrasah (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism Archive).

Harşena Castle

Harşena Mountain, which lies to the north of Amasya's city core, is where it is situated. Another name for it is Harşena Castle. Amasya Castle is situated on a rock that is 300 meters above Yeşilirmak and 700 meters above the sea. Some historians claim that Pontus King Mithridates constructed the castle. Some claim that because Commander Karsan or Harsana had the fortress constructed, it was given the name Harşana/Harşena (see image 7). In 2015, it was included to UNESCO's interim list of global cultural treasures. During past conflicts, Amasya Castle changed hands numerous times and was destroyed in the majority of them. Throughout the Byzantine, Roman, Pontic, and Persian eras, the stronghold was often assaulted but always rebuilt.

After Amasya was overrun by the Turks in 1075, the castle underwent extensive renovations. After this century, the castle's military significance diminished, despite its use up until the 18th century. The city walls are composed of rubble stones, while the castle's top is composed of cut stone. The castle features eight defensive levels that descend to the Yeşilirmak River's banks. Cilanbolu, an 8-meter-diameter corridor, descends from a high point in the center of the castle by 150 steps carved into the rock. Cisterns, water tanks, Ottoman bath ruins, and rock-carved Pontus King Tombs may all be found within the fortress (Amasya Municipality, 2025).



Image 7. A view from Harşena Castle (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism Archive).

Pir İlyas Sücaeddin Tomb

Anatolia started to be occupied in 1402, when Timur defeated the Ottomans in the Battle of Ankara. Pir Sücaeddin İlyas is highly revered and adored for his miracles that rescued the Amasyans from this destruction and looting. This region is called Pirlar Park and is also referred to as the "Upper Pirlar Tomb" since it contains some of the tombs of these esteemed individuals. Gümüşlü Zade Ahmet Bey constructed it in 1486. According to some accounts, this tomb contains the remains of Pir Sücaeddin İlyas, his son-in-law Pir Celaeddin Abdurrahman, his grandson Pir Hayreddin Hızır Çelebi, Mihri Hatun, and their family members (see image 8) (Yeşilirmak Havzası Kalkınma Birliği, 2025).



Image 8. A view from Pir İlyas Türbesi

(<https://www.kulturportali.gov.tr/turkiye/amasya/gezilecekyer/pr-sucaedn--lyas-turbes>)

Amasya's Handicrafts and Festivals

Amasya's traditional festivities and handicrafts also attract interest. The city's cultural diversity is reflected in traditional handicrafts including wood carving, copper embroidery, and hand-woven rugs (see image 9). Amasya's lively culture is also showcased through its distinctive festivals, folk dances, and other cultural events (Amasya Municipality, 2025)



Image 9. Amasya Coppersmiths' Bazaar (<https://gezibiletim.com/amasyada-gezilecek-dogal-ve-tarihi-yerler-amasya-turu/>)

Culinary Culture

Amasya has a rich culinary culture along with a deep-rooted cultural level. Each region has its own unique dishes. Although there is information about some dishes in other regions, it is obvious that it varies in each region. One of these; In many regions of Anatolia, it is the indispensable taste of ceremonial meals such as weddings, circumcision and funerals. Keşkek is an intangible cultural heritage that is important in terms of oral expressions, oral traditions and customs, visual arts, rituals and festivals that have shaped around it from production to consumption. "Aside from all the keşkeks, Amasya keşkek aside" is a common statement among Central Asian Turks, who eat keşkek as one of their primary dishes. This is because it has undergone a revolution via the hands of masters. In addition, "Bakla Dolması" was discovered by the production of dried wide beans by combining them with different components, which produced a beautiful harmony with meat. Even though Amasya cuisine offers a wide variety of delectable options, including as soups, vegetable dishes, meat dishes, pastries, and sweets, it is also widely customary to use preserved summer vegetables in winter recipes (see image 10).

The native specialties of Amasya include *çörek*, *yanuç*, *etli çiçek banya*, *toyga*, and *bıdıklı çorba*. *Zekeriya Sofrası*, which consists of raw food, is one of the oldest Amasya customs. The table is ready for a wish to be granted. Local customs dictate that the individual whose wish is granted sets this table once more at home (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025; Pala, 2021).



Image 10. Keşkek (<https://www.turkascihaberleri.com/HaberDetay/22522/Keskek-Tarifi.html>) and Bakla dolması (<https://berfendber.blogspot.com/2012/09/amasya-mutfag-amasya-cuisine.html?m=1>)

Cultural Heritage Branding Strategies

Elements of cultural heritage are seen as a valuable asset in developing a distinctive municipal brand. Several towns around the world who have succeeded in this area use aspects of their cultural history into their brand and image research. In addition to significantly boosting cities' competitiveness, cultural heritage components give travel destinations a long-term edge in the fiercely competitive travel industry. The local economy, cultural asset preservation, and raising awareness of this issue are all benefited by it (Özyurt ve Sariibrahimoğlu, 2022). In this context, it has been presented in the above section that Amasya city has many values in the field of cultural heritage. It is considered important to bring cultural heritage tourism to the forefront in Amasya city and to put it on the table in the branding process. As a result of this study, some propositions are as follows.

The wealth of a region's cultural legacy is the most important factor in attracting more tourists and fostering its tourism industry. Cultural heritage and tourism branding are closely related. An increase in tourists may emerge from the region's cultural history, which would allow the tourism industry to focus more on it. Furthermore, digital technologies have been employed in destination marketing in recent years to offer new items and enhance existing procedures (Yaralı & Özçelik, 2023).

The originality should be preserved as much as possible when exhibiting cultural treasures for the benefit of visitors. While enhancing the aesthetic appeal of handicrafts, cuisine, folk dances, folk melodies, or cultural structures, it's crucial to protect them and maintain their original shape. Visitors will also place greater value on cultural heritage if it is exhibited with greater care. Additionally, examining the cultural heritage that guests can sample is crucial for experiential marketing. As a result, tourists might be more intrigued (Türker & Çelik, 2012).

Given that Amasya is situated in the Central Black Sea Region, it is possible to develop culturally significant tourist itineraries in conjunction with the neighboring provinces. This itinerary could also include a cultural inventory that covers the areas.

It is possible to expand the number of museums dedicated to cultural values and to build museums with specialized topics. In order to raise awareness of the names of those who made significant contributions to Amasya's history, symposiums, congresses, and workshops might be held.

It is possible to increase knowledge of cultural values and, consequently, educate tourists by offering trainings to the public and staff of Amasya province's enterprises. Organizing field trips for pupils helps increase their awareness of cultural values.

By constructing enough places of a high enough caliber and quantity to enable visitors to remain in Amasya for an extended amount of time, conditions can be established that will encourage them to stay there. The cleanliness of the

surroundings and proper illumination of cultural places can receive more attention. It is possible to adequately renovate deteriorated buildings.

Digital technology can be used to create cultural pathways, tell the stories of historical personalities, and educate tourists about cultural values. It might be crucial to advertise Amasya well on social media and raise awareness by inviting well-known people to the event. In urban locations, posters and billboards can be erected to reach a wider audience. Visitors can purchase more intriguing handicrafts and souvenirs.

The key figures and sites of worship in Islam and Christianity can be chosen to be highlighted within the context of religious tourism, and additional marketing tactics can be focused on them. The number of faith workshops, conferences, and symposiums can be expanded to enhance the number of visitors.

Because stories have a lasting effect on visitors, more individuals will be able to learn about and experience cultural heritage. Therefore, it will guarantee its marketability and reach a wider audience, allowing the cultural legacy to become sustainable (Kaya & Ünlüönen, 2021).

When it comes to the richness of cultural legacy, Amasya holds a significant position. The competitive tourism industry depends heavily on the marketing tactics discussed above as well as the promotion of the city's significant cultural heritage sites, which are determined in collaboration with stakeholders. Increasing the number of tourists while considering the city's capacity and making sure this is done in a sustainable way has become essential for the city to get the required portion of tourism.

Conclusion

The cultural values and natural beauty of cities are important factors in the branding process. In this regard, it may be claimed that one of the most powerful components of city branding is the material and immaterial cultural heritage of cities.

Many local studies on tourism have been addressed in Amasya to date, some have gathered dust on the shelves, some have reached their target to some extent. With this study, it has been stated how important cultural heritage values are in the branding process of Amasya. In fact, the target declaration of this study is to emphasize that cultural heritage values should be at the forefront in the development of Amasya tourism. All relevant stakeholders in the city of Amasya (municipality, Amasya governorship, Amasya university, tourism and hotel sector, community representatives and etc.) will accelerate the process if they put forward a common vision and continue the necessary work.

This study is a preliminary study and there are many more cultural heritage values not included in this study and will form the basis for subsequent studies.

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