



The Making ‘a City of Spectacle’: Marketing Istanbul through Images and Discourses

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In the 21st century, within the emergence of the new global politics and economics, the municipal and governmental programmes of Istanbul may be seen as a ‘marketing strategy’ for attracting foreign investment and tourists, reminiscent of David Harvey’s reading of “through imagery and massive architectural projects, even entire cities and metropolitan areas may be served up as market objects and all - encompassing spectacles”. His comparison of the late 1990s is also valid for the economic and social mentality of the Turkish context in the third millennium in the process of being the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010. In this context, the task of local and central authorities has become to make suitable conditions for attracting multi-national investments (Caglar Keyder, 2000), using the potentials and dynamics of the city (such as infrastructure services, cultural and historical values, architectural and urban projects or mega events) as marketing tools. In this process, as the economical policies are not enough for the achievement of the competition, cities thus are marketed showing off their characteristic diversities for their advantage for a global market of image, sound and voice (Ayse Öncü, 1992). And Prime Minister R.T. Erdogan declared: ‘My primary duty is to sell my city’.

Combined with tourism, cultural events have been an opportunity to demonstrate to the European Union and the United States, the economic, technological and physical as well as conservative / Islamic power change in Istanbul. In this context, the making of a stage for the ‘dialogue of civilizations’ between the West and the Islamic countries following the attacks of 9/11 as well as a stage for the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010 have been introduced with a motto of “making the most of being a European Capital of Culture” in a “city of four elements” through the ‘tourist gaze’. In this process, Istanbul, following massive number of urban demolitions and removals, is welcoming a series of regeneration projects in the architectural and urban fields as well as mega events - transforming the city into place of spectacle as pronounced by Guy Debord. With a concept of ‘cultural finance’, the city of spectacle has been marketed by a process what we call ‘museumification’, where the entire city has become a stage for ‘cultural tourist gaze’. On one hand, with rhetoric of the making ‘a new and clean urban image for Istanbul’, a large number of regeneration projects of the central city are reminiscent of the previous western examples as part of physicalisation of financial flows. On the other hand, this rapid process is not simply part of a 2010 European Capital of Culture. We argue that the project should also be seen as part of a systematic image making and forceful clearance policy applied by the local and central authorities. The clearance and image-making process, defined by eight discourse streamlines (“Orientalist City”, “Nostalgic City”, “Metropolis”, “Centre- City” / “Brand-City”, “Beautiful City” / “Aesthetic City” / “Clean City”, “Safe City” / “Orderly City”), has unveiled a systematic and hidden agenda of the authorities, indicating social inequalities, discrimination, gentrification in terms of the making new forms of richness and powerness of the 21st century city.

Based on a discourse analysis of social actors, our study aims at investigating the emergence of controversies in the 2010 European Capital of Culture program. The study is going to present, first of all, a theoretical framework in general. Secondly, the architectural and urban projects are outlined through the discourse analysis of the rhetoric of the social actors. Finally, brief concluding remarks are given. The study presents only a partial story of a tremendous change in the city of Istanbul. It gives a broader understanding on the urban transformation and its political and cultural context in general.

KEY WORDS: Istanbul, city marketing, urban image and discourses, city of spectacle, Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture projects.