CREATING A CITY IMAGE FOR ISTANBUL: RELIGION AS THE MAIN THEME

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ABSTRACT

City images in urban tourism have become affective tools of having a competitive advantage over other cities in attraction of visitors. Creating an image for a city, which claims a sound position on the global network of cities, has become a process of expertise. Several actors are involved in similar processes in different cities to create a city image which is often a collection of various themes and features. This work evaluates the process of creating a city image in Istanbul where the religion plays a vital role as a theme in image making.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the discourse of marketing cities, creating city images and branding places has gained considerable significance in urban studies. As cities have become the predominant access points on the global network of economies, they have begun to act more freely from central governments in terms of policy making. Due to deindustrialization, cities developed new strategies which provided new benefits and opportunities. The quest for new strategies of generating income has accelerated the competition of cities for attracting foreign direct investment, tourists, visitors and other potential "costumers". Therefore, image making has become crucial to acquire a competitive advantage over other cities. Cities have been in a rush to distinguish themselves through their distinctive features to attract visitors, tourists, investors and entrepreneurs.

In this paper, I will try to analyze the city image created for Istanbul. In the following, I will discuss religion as the major theme in this image making. Before moving on Istanbul's image, I will explore the literature about the city image and urban branding.

2. Literature Review

There is an extensive amount of literature focusing on the concept of city image. Looking at various studies, one can notice the consensus among scholars that the city image has remarkable connections with globalization, deindustrialization and competition among cities. Particular viewpoints to the city image are worthwhile to mention. For instance, the positive image of a city is considered to affect urban regeneration (Paddison, 1993; McCarthy, 1998). The importance of events (Hall, 1992; Law, 1993) such as Olympics (Zhang and Zhao, 2009), European Cultural Capital (Richards and Wilson 2001), Eurovision Song Competition, commercial exhibitions or meetings (see Hall et. al, 2002) and festivals (Harvey, 1991; Gotham, 2001; Maxwell, 2002; Prentice and Vivien, 2003; Quinn, 2005; Belgahzi, 2006) are cited in various studies. Moreover, creating a city image is regarded as a tool to overcome a chronic fiscal crisis of a particular city (see Greenberg, 2003). On the other hand, remaking city image underlines a radical shift (from city of manufacturing to cultural, tourist or conventional city) (Short et al, 1993; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Meethan, 1997; Ward, 1998). The focus on creative class (Vanalo, 2008), the role of institutions (Greenberg, 2003), public-private partnerships (Ward, 2000), cities as entrepreneurs (Harvey, 1989; Hall et. al, 2002) or media's role (Avraham, 2004) as image makers are other mainstream view points. Apart from those, there are also urban scholars who focus mostly on the strategies of marketing and branding rather than socio-economical aspects (see Selby and Morgan, 1996; Karavatzis, 2004; Karavatzis and Ashworth, 2005).

The definitions and content of the city image vary but not mutually exclusive. As it is a competition for global market, cities must distinguish themselves with using distinctive features. These features can derive from anything; they can be very abstract and general such as history (Rome), religion (Jerusalem) or very specific such as annual events (Edinburgh festival) or even a single event (Helsinki, European Capital of Culture 2000). Therefore, it is a hard task to clearly define what the image of a city is. Some scholars preferred to question the content of the image. For instance, the image may include sum of beliefs, ideals and impressions of potential visitors (Kotler et al, 1993). Mental perceptions (Saleh, 2001) such as urban imaginary (Greenberg, 2000) may determine the image. On the contrary, physical entities such as landmarks take a part in image making (Hall, 1992). Beyond those, previous studies introduced the advantages and disadvantages of the cities for their images. Several factors influence the image of a city such as the quality of facilities, population, socioeconomic status (Avraham, 2004,) safety (Savitch and Ardashev, 2001; Barker and Page, 2002; Savitch, 2005), international accessibility, quality of tourism facilities, traffic conditions, environmental issues etc. (see Hall et al, 2002). Finally, there are numerous case studies which are often testing the applicability of those frameworks cited above. The case studies primarily concentrated on one city and its distinctive local features for the image making (see Hall, 1996; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006; Boland, 2008; Aoyama, 2009; Bickford-Smith, 2009)

3. Research Questions, Methodology And Data

This paper neither seeks to repeat this broad content and findings of previous studies nor test the applicability of various hypotheses about city image. This paper is also not going to make an emphasis on general and abstract concepts like cultural heritage, events, art and music or specific local features of a city. Instead, it aims to represent Istanbul's image as a distinctive case, where the concept of religion is used extensively as a theme for creating an image for a multicultural metropolis, Istanbul, although the city itself is not considered as a conventional religious center, unlike Jerusalem or Mecca. In addition, Istanbul's image does not totally depend on local features but on a global phenomenon, fostered by the architectural representations and the local manifestation of the religions. Based on the analysis of visual data and texts, the study attempts to adapt a broader aspect, bringing both the global and local in.

In analyzing image making in Istanbul, I will answer the following questions: How to read the image making process? What is the purpose of using religion as the main theme? What are the signs of religion as a theme on other minor and secondary themes? What is the contribution of Istanbul's case to the literature of image making? In which points the theme of religion fails in terms of the clash between the city image and urban facts?

My primary data consists of booklets, travel guides, brochures, guidebooks, advertisements, reports, maps and statistics from the websites of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the Turkish Board of Statistics and 2010 Istanbul: The European Capital of Culture. The material presented in international and domestic tourism fairs is going to be used as well.
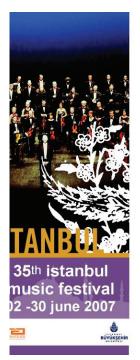
4. Istanbul As A Tourist City

Over the past two decades, Turkey as a developing country, witnessed several problems due to its rapid economic growth. Immigration to urban areas, drastic change in population, emergence of new socio-economic classes, changes in income distribution, urban segregation and social exclusion revealed as major problems due to the establishment of liberal economy (Kazgan, 2002; Şaylan 2003; Güler, 2005; Keyder 2005). Neoliberal shift in economy was accompanied by structural adjustment policies, which redefined the role of local governments. Due to decentralization policies and delegation of authority from central government, local governments have become real decision makers on urban level (Bartu and Kırlı, 1997; Bezmez, 2008).

There is no doubt that Istanbul enjoyed the benefits of economic growth and more than any other city in Turkey. For instance, Istanbul's central role in Turkish economy has been consolidated due to the rapid increase in direct foreign investment. In 1980, there were only 78 foreign companies with 35 million USD direct investments; in 2007 there were 18303 companies which had foreign stockholders with 21.9 billion USD (Undersecretary of Treasure). Between 1980 and 1998, the share of manufacturing in foreign direct investments was decreasing from 91.5% to 62% that of the service sector rose from 8.4% to 36.7% (Özdemir, 2002: 252). In 2003, the share of the service sector was 49.57 % whereas the share of manufacturing dropped to 41.52 % (Undersecretary of Treasure). In this context, the distribution of foreign direct investment reflects deindustrialization in Istanbul which took place first in the core, then adjacent areas of the city center where the service sector became dominant on economic activities (Öncü, 2005; Keyder, 2000; Erkip, 2000: 372). Today, Istanbul generates 55% of Turkey's trade, 45% of the country's wholesale trade, and 21.2% of Turkey's gross national product; it also contributes 40% of all taxes collected in Turkey (Price Waterhouse Coopers Report, 2005). In addition, 95% of banking and other financial services are located in Istanbul (Özdemir, 2002: 252). Istanbul's population doubled in 20 years due to rapid economic growth and immigration. The population grew from 5 million in 1980 to about 10 million in 2000; in 2008 it reached 12 million (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2009)

Istanbul's rapid transformation is represented on the discourse level. Over the past decade, there is an eclectic literature about promoting Istanbul's unique position between "The West and the East". Inspired by Saskia Sassen's global city paradigm, Istanbul's potentials to become a regional and possibly a global center is discussed (Keyder and Öncü, 1994; Bartu, 2000; Bora, 2000; Öktem 2005). In time, this notion has become a common objective and a point of consensus among almost all political parties and urban coalitions in Istanbul (Erkip, 2000, Keyder, 2005).

Figure 1 Istanbul Music Festival in 2007 (Venue: St. Irene Church) - (Source: Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Tourism Board)

Figure 2 Illustration Presented at International Tourism Fairs - (Source: Source: Turkish History Foundation, 2009)

In this period, tourism industry also enjoyed the financial priorities, incentives and credits; public lands were offered for rent to entrepreneurs in reasonable conditions (Aykaç, 2009; 18). Tourism Promotion Act in 1982 provided a legal basis for state support for the development of tourist facilities (Kocabaş, 2006: 116). Consequently Turkey achieved to be a "tourism country" since the late 1980s[1] (Urry, 2002) and Istanbul has become the major access point to Turkey. In 2008, more than 25 million tourists visited Turkey, most of whom entered the country through the airports and seaports of Istanbul and Antalya (website: http://www.kultur.gov.tr). Having 26 million passengers in 2008, Istanbul Atatürk Airport is projected to be among the top 40 airports in the world (website: http://www.dhmi.gov.tr/dosyalar/istatistik/2008yiliistatistikleri.asp). In 2008, Istanbul was ranked as 7th on the list of the most visited cities in the world, with more than 7 million international visitors in a year (Colliers International Istanbul Hotel Market Report, 2009). Although Istanbul's potential to become a global city is still questionable, the city is eager to stop being a transfer point but a tourist city

for visitors, who are traveling to other regions, particularly to the south of Turkey. Accepting this new role, Istanbul improved its tourism facilities for hospitality management. The historical center was regenerated; manufacturing units were displaced, traffic was reordered and historical tissue was put under preservation (Keyder, 2000; Öncü, 2005). Five-star hotels and facilities, consumption artifacts with authentic motives for tourists, shopping malls were designed to please the tourist gaze (Öncü, 1997; Keyder, 2005: 128; Potuoğlu-Cook, 2006: 637). Increasing number of international events signifies a turning point that Istanbul's primary objectives and strategies are different from Turkey's national tourism policies[2]. This difference is a fine point to begin analyzing the image making of Istanbul.

1 According to UNWTO (World Tourism Organization), Turkey is ranked 8th on the list of the most visited countries in 2008.

2 The main international events that Istanbul hosted, or is going to host are: 1996 Habitat II, 2000 Bid for Summer Olympics (Lost to Sydney),2001 European Basketball Championship,2004 Eurovision Song Contest, 2004 NATO Summit, 2004 Bid for UEFA European Football Championship (with Greece, lost to Portugal), 2005 UEFA Champions League Final, 2006 Red Bull Air Race World Series,2007 European Strategy Forum, 2007 Formula 1 (First Time), 2008 Peace Treaty negotiations between Syria and Israel in Istanbul, 2009 UEFA Cup Final, 2009 World Bank and IMF Summit, 2010 World Basketball Championship, 2010 World Water Forum, 2010 European Capital of Culture, 2011-2013 Sony Ericsson WTA (Women's Tennis Association) Championships.

5. RELIGION AS THE MAIN THEME

Creating a city image refers to a radical change in tourism management in Turkey. Turkey has always been famous for its warm Mediterranean climate, sandy beaches and clean bays, ancient cities and historical heritage which are mostly far from urban areas. Consequently, previous tourism campaigns focused on such non-urban metaphors. Cities were secondary in tourism marketing which was done mostly on national level before. The rise of urban tourism (including cultural tourism, conventional tourism, events tourism, sports tourism, shopping tourism etc.) challenged tourism marketing on national level.

As recent studies have emphasized, marketing a city requires a particular city image which is specific and distinguished from national tourism advertisements. Today in Istanbul, The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Tourism Board (from now on, IMMTB) and European Capital of Culture Agency (from now on, ECOC) are dominant image makers rather than The Ministry of Culture and Tourism. In ECOC, private-public partnerships, Non-governmental organizations, professionals and academic units are represented (website:http://www.en.istanbul2010.org/2010AKBAJANSI/koordinasyon/index.htm).

Istanbul's image promotion could be analyzed through the movies, the pictures, booklets, brochures, billboards, texts, presentations, drawings, and illustrations which are prepared by IMMTB and ECOC. In the following, I will discuss the main theme of this new image, "the religion".

To begin with, reading through Istanbul's city image, one can clearly observe religious features; not only the great number of mosques, churches, synagogues and other religious landmarks on movies or on pictures, but also sounds of temples or prays, the texts quoted from religious books and religious figures and icons. On the official websites of The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there are direct and indirect references to religious elements[3].

This theme has roots in Istanbul's multi-religious past. The city was literally "the capital of civilizations"[4]; the capital of Roman Empire (330-395), Eastern Roman Byzantine Empire (395-1204 and 1261-1453), Latin Empire (Armies of IV. Crusade established a short lived state, 1204-1261) and Ottoman Empire (1453-1922). These entities defined themselves on the basis of Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic faiths, respectively. If Sephardic Jews, who arrived in 1492 as refugees, were taken into consideration, the picture of three monotheist religions is complete. In addition, historically two ecumenical leaders of Christian Orthodoxy (Patriarch of Constantinople) and The Caliph resided in Istanbul for centuries. One can easily perceive this "religious" nature of the city, while roaming around the old Sultanahmet and Galata where numerous operational mosques, churches and synagogues are located[5].
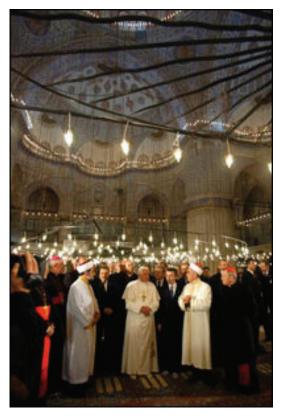

Figure 3 Hagia (Saint) Sophia

(Being one of the oldest and famous churches of Christianity, Hagia Sophia served as a mosque from 1453 until 1935 when it was converted to a museum. It is one Istanbul, describing the embracing of two continents, with one arm reaching out to Asia and the other to Europe.(http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN/Genel/BelgeGoster.aspx?17A16AE30572D3 13679A66406202CCB0251C64DF22CCB2F6)

3 On the official website of Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the introductory information about Istanbul begins with a quotation from La Martine: The God and human, nature and art are together in there, they have created such a perfect place that it is valuable to see." Lamartine's line reveals his love for

4 "Capital of Civilizations" has been occasionally used as a metaphor in tourism campaigns. It is also the title of the official movie of the European Capital of Culture event (see: http://www.istanbul2010.org/IST-VIDEO/index.htm?video=GP_582992).

5 There are 2.944 mosques, 123 churches and 30 synagogues (10 operational) in Istanbul.

of the prominent symbols of the city and very much used figure in Istanbul's image construction as a landmark)

Figure 4 Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Hagia Sophia
(Source: www.ntvmsnbc.com)

As each city image does, Istanbul's image carries messages to address visitors, particularly from Western countries. First, there is an extensive use of authentic, exotic Orientalist features to foster the image of a "timeless city"; a place where a tourist can enjoy his or her idleness in contrast to his or her daily monotonous life (see website: http://sunumer.ibb.gov.tr/kultur-bakanligi-istanbul-tanitim-filmi). This typical image of any city in the "East" is not actually new or creative. On the other hand, when religion has gained a central position in image making, the messages have begun to contain more serious topics rather than idleness. The visitors are expected to be sensitive. For instance, Istanbul claims to be the place where different beliefs existed and will exist peacefully. Rather than the point of "clash of civilizations", Istanbul is supposed to be the place where the dichotomies turn into harmony, conflicts to tolerance and peace; where "the West" and "the East" and "the Modern" and "the Traditional" live together.

Figure 5 Album Cover by Turkish Musician Kudsi Erguner

The significance of using religion as a major theme can be analyzed in four dimensions. First, creating a city image for a particular city in Turkey is rather new phenomenon. However this campaign points out a drastic change in tourism management in Turkey. "Urban tourism" has emerged as a beneficial policy for the cities. There are new "customers", interested in historical and cultural heritage. Consequently, new type of visitors caused new metaphors in image making. In addition, the actors also changed. For instance, the role of local governments increased in tourism policies. NGOs began to take roles in decision making.

Figure 6 Booklet Covers
(Source: Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Tourism Board)

Second, creating image in Istanbul represents an original

feature. As previous studies emphasized, the image of a city shall reflect its cultural and historical features which are supposed to be distinctive, original and even if possible, unique. However, this generalization does not totally fit the case of Istanbul. Istanbul's image does not stem from a local feature but a global, widely known abstract concept: religion. As Istanbul's presented image does not base on a local feature but on a global phenomenon which has been attributed new meanings, it is possible to address potential visitors in a much broader sense.

introduced as centers of faith tourism whereas Istanbul is not mentioned as a destination (Tourism Strategy of Turkey-2023, The Ministry of Culture and Tourism).

Figure 8 A Conference in Bosporus University

Figure 7 Tourism Fair in Utrecht (Source: Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Tourism Board)

Third, considering those new meanings, religion is used in both limited and extensive sense as an image maker. For instance, in introductory movies, pictures or other visual documents, the images of Islam have been chosen carefully as we do not see much of veiled or covered women figures or collective praying which may lead "misinterpretations" among visitors. Besides, there is always a slight emphasis on secular state and modern society of Turkey, which is not only far from fundamentalism but also as a guarantee for visitor's safety. On the other hand, religion is used in a broad sense that it dominates other minor themes. The influence of religion manifests on cultural scenes, art, literature, music, historical interpretations, festivals etc.

Fourth, frequent use of religious content in city image is also remarkable because Istanbul is not a "holy" city in religious sense. Although religions played considerable roles in city's history, Istanbul is not pilgrimage point of attraction unlike Jerusalem or Mecca. As a matter of fact, other cities like Ephesus Şanlıurfa and Mardin are

Figure 9 Euro Islam Conference in Istanbul

These four dimensions may give a clue about the purpose of using religion as an image maker. First of all, it is an original way to use a global phenomenon to define a place that potential visitors may find fascinating. Secondly, as safety is a vital criterion in tourism, the idea of different beliefs existing together in peace may make visitors feel more comfortable. Thirdly, using religion as a main theme is not contradicting with the cultural heritage of Istanbul. Instead, it is a fine way to label anything with Islam such as Islamic Art, Islamic Sufi Music or Islamic Literature which is emphasizing the authentic, the different, the Oriental, in a sense, the other. Lastly, stressing on religious tolerance has certainly connections with Turkey's foreign policy. As Istanbul is not a holy city in the sense of Jerusalem or Mecca, religion as a theme, includes political attributions. For instance, the image of Istanbul constitutes also the image of Turkey. This affects foreign relations, particularly the public opinion in the EU member states which is a key element in Turkey's accession to the EU.

6. Controversial Issues

It has been a dispute whether the image of a city totally reflects the reality or not and how precise the reflection is, as the image often refers to desirability not the reality. Therefore, the image of a city is always in question, as no city represents itself in a "negative" way[6]. Image making often brings questions like "who are creating the image", "what is the level of participation and representation", "who and what are excluded from the image".

In the Istanbul case, it is hard to measure the level of participation but it is clear that some urban facts are not represented at all. Just like in any other city image, the poor and the unprivileged or "unpleasant" features for visitors are excluded on the representative level. City image is made up with "imaginary" elements rather than urban "facts". For instance, inhabitants with different religious backgrounds are presented to live peacefully in Istanbul. However despite ethnic variety, non-Muslims (Orthodox Armenians and Greeks, Catholics,

Protestants, Jews and others) constitute less than 1% of the population in Turkey (Oran, 2002). More than 90% of the Christians belong to Greek, Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Churches. Numbers do vary but it is estimated that there are less than 100.000 Christians in total[7]. Jewish people, mostly Sephardic Jews, constitute only 0.03% of the population. There are approximately 18.400 Jews living in Turkey (website: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/jewpop.html). Although most of these religious groups live in Istanbul, they are very few in number. In this context, Istanbul's religious theme is based on historical or the architectural heritage rather than current conditions; in other words it represents an "imaginary" rather than reality.

Second, the constructed image points out a harmonious coexistence with tolerance and respect to different beliefs. It was certain that Ottoman Empire was a multi religious entity and its capital was the arena of numerous ethnic and religious groups. Nevertheless, this coexistence was based on certain regulations; each religious group had their own neighborhood, jobs and crafts, even their own dress code with different civil obligations and rights (Inalcik, 2007). Attributing the concept of tolerance to the city's past is another nostalgic imaginary assumption which also does not work properly in the present time. There are still big question marks about the freedom of religion in Turkey. Some religious groups are definitely not enjoying this tolerance policy. There are several reservations about restrictions of religious practices in Turkey (European Union Turkey 2009 Progress Report). For example, there are about 10-12 million Alevis (a sect in Islam) in Turkey, who are not officially recognized as a minority; their temples (Cemevi) are not also considered as religious public places (Oran, 2002). On the other hand, Greek Orthodox community has complaints about Turkish governments' restrictions over the only theological seminary in Heybeliada, Istanbul (Aydıntaşbaş, 2009). In addition, Protestant Church's

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6 Perhaps the case in New York, in the 1970s, is a good example for an exceptional case. There was such a headline on newspapers that "New York Police Department warns visitors not to come to New York due to high crime rates". Source (Greenberg, 2003: 397)

7 Estimated numbers of Christians are: Armenian Orthodox 45.000, Syrian Orthodox 15.000, Catholic, 5000, Greek Orthodox 4000, Protestant, 3000. There are also small numbers of Bulgarian, Nestorian, Chaldean, Georgian Orthodox and Anglican Christians (Milliyet, 2009)

several applications to open a new church were rejected several times (Radikal, 2009).

7. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to analyze and discuss a process of image making in Istanbul with introducing the religion as the main theme. Turkey's economic transition after the 1980's is presented as a starting point to understand the development of tourism in Istanbul. The study tried to focus on the distinctive feature of city image from national image construction in the Istanbul case. The image created for Istanbul has several common points with the framework constructed by former studies; nevertheless the paper concentrates on the original features in Istanbul's case. At first glance, using religion as a theme refers to a quite different strategy than using and marketing only local characteristics. In this context, I tried to depict different meanings attributed to religion which is used in a limited and broad sense as an image maker. The image's validity is also questioned though the theme of religion. The contradicting points between the reality and the imaginary are stated with reference to demographics and practical applications of religious activities. Despite such contradictions, the image making in Istanbul is quite successful so far. It is anticipated that the number of visitors and investors will go on increasing in 2010 and after, in accordance with the European Capital of Culture event.

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