

Representing Local Identities in Resort Hotels - A Case Study in Antalya

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Tourism is usually defined as the act of both social and economical activities during leisure or vacation. According to Lawson, tourism gives the opportunity to enjoy and learn different cultures, discover history and new places, and have fun while traveling¹.

Tourism is not just a grouping of different commercial activities; it involves a people's ideologies about history, culture, nature and tradition. These ideologies can become so powerful; they can change culture and nature to fit their idea of what should be².

Starting from the second half of the 20th century, mass tourism has started to spread; the profile of the tourists, the expectations and demands of them have altered. In this period, there have been many changes in economical, political, social, cultural and organizational fields of life, and consumption has become dominant³. Tanyeli states that accelerating mass tourism has been transformed "individual tourists" to "statistical tourist"⁴.

Consumption as part of tourism is a very complex and selective process. Tourism is derived of our anticipation to be astonished by different scales or sensations that the ones usually experienced. The places are chosen to be involved in the tourism activity by "looking at" or "gazing upon" objects, places, landscapes, and so on, and to experience the new and different⁵.

Consumption is a practice that reflects the limitations and opportunities of modern time; it consists on a process of selection that is influenced by social, cultural and economic values⁶. On the other hand Baudrillard expresses that there is no limita-

tion on consumption, somehow people would like to consume more and more easily⁷.

Consuming places are global and they define their own space without any belongings, context and/or geographical border⁸. They have the ability to manipulate time or in other words, they can create their own era. According to Zukin, "New consuming places simulated to boost consuming. Such places protect and divide consumers' inner sense from outside world. Places such as fun are being consumed easily, and they are usually designed as 'Dream Worlds'"⁹.

A critical feature of consumption in our time is the need for a holiday. The ability to buy time to avoid work and replace it with other kinds of activities is viewed as a characteristic of health and wellbeing¹⁰.

CONSUMPTION OF IDENTITIES

Today visual identities are consumed without question as most of the aspects of social life that have been aestheticised. Purchasing and consuming an image has become widespread especially in tourism activities. Additionally it has become more pervasive between the "new middle class" in many different contexts and cultures¹¹.

Within the concept of modern consuming era, the image of the consuming products reflect the image of consumers; their way of living, attitude or else identity. They consume to determine their status in their social class, define themselves and their roles, form and preserve their social presence, express their thoughts and identities¹². Basically there are

three factors that drive consumers' choice while making travel plans. These are: Seeking for luxury and addiction to 'Brand', thinking that luxury and brand are proof of their status, and seeking for comfortableness. As a result of rapid development in transportation and communication, destinations turn into vogue and are a part of social life; image has become the key factor in selection and strengthening of the touristic aspects.

All around the world cities are thriving to base their economies upon tourism, and turn their destination into a "vogue". The cities are trying hard to become dreamscapes of visual consumption as well as presenting the culture, heritage and architecture authentically to the tourist¹³.

MacCannell suggests that the tourists seek for the authenticity but it is not successful since those being "gazed upon" come to construct artificial sites¹⁴. Urry claims that the tourist spaces are organized around 'staged authenticity'. Urry also defines the tourists who almost delight the inauthenticity as 'post-tourists'. According to him, these tourists know the authentic tourist experience does not exist without the tourism input, and any so-called authenticity is a 'pasted surface feature' of post-modern experience¹⁵.

Yet representation of the cities is effective on marketing the authenticity and cultural identity. As understanding ethnicity means a full perception of the tradition, the local culture invites tourist to "pay to see" its "realness". The phenomenon of "hyper-tradition" is recreated by the local culture¹⁶. It is visualized in a more pervasive approach in the 'themed' environment. Urry quotes what Eco summarizes as:

"These apparently real and authentic environments are 'travels in hyper-reality'... Disneyland tells us that technology can give us more reality than nature can."

Urry states that in these environments tourists are encouraged to gaze upon and consume images and identities of many cultures. *He claims*

*"This is made possible by the most extreme form of 'time-space compression', what one might term global miniaturization."*¹⁷

Today postmodernism requires global identities and does de-differentiated local cultures. Identities and

images are consumed rapidly, and the relationship between representations and reality has become a problematic issue in postmodern cultures. Urry also states

*"What is consumed in tourism are visual signs and sometimes simulacrum; and this is what is consumed when we are supposedly not acting as tourists at all."*¹⁸

Disneyland, which has been analyzed by Jean Baudrillard, is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. He claims,

*"It is first of all a play of illusion and phantasm. Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that is Disneyland. Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belongs to the hyper-real order and the order of simulation."*¹⁹

CONSUMPTION OF RESORT HOTELS

Today, it is apparent that the demands of the consumers of resort hotels have changed and altered, and it can clearly be observed that it is insufficient to meet only the need of accommodation anymore. Besides that, the consumers expect more about entertainment, adventure and boundless facilities. Animations, shows and attractions are now playing a key factor, and resorts aim to make consuming, something to enjoy²⁰.

In consuming era, the trend is to offer variety of choices and 'Dream Worlds' for tourists to pick their own role²¹. Resort hotels are involved to offer more bold, colorful and imaginative designs than any other architectural genre now²². They compete each other to provide tourists the "different". Reimer suggests that the need for the 'different' is the reason behind the new itineraries, new activities, new destinations, new marketing strategies, and themed environments²³.

Among all types of resorts, the themed hotels stand out for aiming basically at leisure and amusement. The authenticity is replaced by the hyper-reality through the redefinition of traditional environments by mass tourism. Thus, architectural and visual representations are thematized, and the processes of Disneyfication and Las Vegasization have become important common characteristics of resort areas to create the new "authenticity"²⁴. Tsui states

"Traditions and heritages are no longer place-specific. Nevertheless, few are aware that the borrowed traditions and heritages have now been localized in Las Vegas, and it is precisely the concentration of mimicked heritages and commodified experiences, embodied in a space of spectacle, that creates the city's unique sense of place."²⁵

It has been argued that when the simulation superimposes the inherited reality, possesses them and becomes a point of references itself, it becomes authentic. Las Vegas and Disney World have almost attained the status of originals, and as being the new originals they are now quoted and imitated²⁶; as it came true in Lara, Antalya.

RESORT HOTELS IN LARA, ANTALYA

Antalya is Turkey's most popular tourist destination. Antalya has been a very important maritime city throughout the history because of its geography and climate. Natural and historical patterns form the traditional city character of Antalya. Antalya carries the messages of civilizations, which go back thousands of years of historical and archaeological values. Situated in the ancient Pamphylia Region, Antalya is rich in historic sites and monuments dating from Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Seljukian and Ottoman periods. Phaselis, Termessos, Side, Aspendos and Perge are only a few surviving examples that have witnessed the long history of the region.

Population began to increase with immigration beginning in 1950's and after the urbanization the economic structure became inadequate. It was 1953 when the word "tourism" came to sight. In the same year, a law promoting the tourism industry was accepted by the Parliament. Since 1960's, tourism in the Antalya region has been a priority for Turkey due to its densely natural and historical tourism values. In 1969, the Government defined Aegean and Mediterranean coasts with a 3 km width as tourism regions. In 1973, Ministry of Culture and Tourism had the Master Plan of Antalya prepared as well. The projection period of this plan was the year 2000 and it proposed a 174.000-bed capacity. The number of beds in Antalya reached 100.000 in 1994, and in 2000, the planned target year, the number of the beds climbed over the proposed bed number and reached 230.000.

In 1980, tourism was encouraged to constitute a new sector as an economical and political objective. Tourism is now the second largest industry in

Turkey, attracting a total of 28.6 million visitors. The number of tourists visiting Antalya reached 9.6 million in thirty years. The support given to the entrepreneurs by the government through the tourism planning decisions accelerated the residence's demand. From this period on, through the support of foreign investments aimed to make progress, a different process, which was improved with a Franchise chain system, begun.

Related to this process the tourism construction has gained a fast acceleration, and a great number of hotels and holiday villages have been built on the east and west coasts of Antalya. Local architectural images and forms are used on most of the buildings constructed, but they are usually left as a picturesque dimension. This approach not only forms a paradox between fake and real elements but also makes the local architecture worthless and ordinary. According to Guzer, "Local concept" has been an element of tourism that is consumed rapidly. Identity is not a geographical or cultural reality anymore, but an input of a program that affects the marketing strategies²⁷. Then another approach "themed resort hotels" has developed in 2000's at Lara region of Antalya. Now, a new tourism center full of luxurious -mostly themed- hotels is rapidly growing in the region. Construction of new facilities and infrastructure works are being done in Lara region, and after the completion of the construction works, the number of beds will increase up to 30,000.

In Lara, physical replicas of historical buildings and/or cities have been built -like in Las Vegas-, and a new tourism region is constructed by spreading these hotels on the touristic plots that are lined up in juxtaposition and perpendicular to the sea -unlike Las Vegas-. Thematic hotels like Topkapi Palace, Kremlin Palace, Venezia Palace, Titanic de Luxe, Concorde Resort & Spa, Mardan Palace were built next to each other, all along the Lara shore, in order to create simulated environments that satisfy a consumer culture of hyper-tourism.

The idea behind thematic hotels is to extend the market by providing different images, shows, stages and life styles. Hasan Sokmen who is the architect of many thematic hotels in Antalya claims:

"Las Vegas is the place where architecture is a virtual show... First of all, thematic hotels provide tremendous benefits on advertising and marketing

*the hotel. Compare to standard resorts, they can be recognized easily..."*²⁸

However he was missing the fact that Las Vegas' –the small desert city- short history is not comparable to the long history of Antalya.

Unfortunately, these thematic hotels have no resemblance to real traditions, and are not related to the city, its history, its culture and its climate at all. Tourism architecture in the region has all been left to the managers' marketing strategies and the hotels have been turned into a stage decoration. These thematic hotels might actually offer a Russian tourist to have his drink at "Kremlin Palace" while having a sunbath in "dreamland". The resort has been designed as a space for the performance of exoticism, a staging that requires visitors to be complicit in this performance, to also play their parts.

DISCUSSION

Nowadays, researches show us that, the demand for resorts are not only limited with accommodation. Consumers are now seeking for fun, adventure, and unlimited activity while staying at a resort. Although new thematic resorts may attract customers with their image, they are far from fulfilling this demand. By many researchers, it has been argued that, in the long run, resorts that focus on service quality, activity and organizational structure would succeed.

With no doubt, it is necessary to be distinctive, present a new image and offer new facilities in order to take place in the market and survive. But it is also obvious that the resort hotels built with a concept of formal replicas and these fashionable themes may fade rapidly and lose their value since they may cause boredom in a short period and consumed. However, the ones diverse in the means of facilities they offer, without conceding the architectural qualities and uniqueness, will be more successful in a long time period.

In this sense, the questions are "Why does Turkey insist on promoting and/or representing itself with this themed environments instead of presenting its rich architectural heritage and strong culture?" and "Can we really represent local identities in resort hotels?"

Auge states,

*"If a place can be defined as rational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as rational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which do not integrate the earlier places."*²⁹

Based on this identification we can easily define resort hotels as non-places like airports and shopping malls. Then it is worth to discuss the new design principles of resort hotels. Perhaps they should be designed as non-places, with their own design principles different than traditional places. Process of design should be well analyzed, and all the variables like the sector, investors' and tourist's demands should be determined prior to the design. Architect's role here is to provide a more flexible and unique design that meets all the necessities of a non-place without losing the architectural quality.

ENDNOTES

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