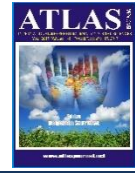




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ICONIC STRUCTURES IN THE CONTEXT OF URBAN IDENTITY AND BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

Urban identity includes the city's geographical, economic, social, physical characteristics and the political structure which depends on; on the other hand, it is also an important concept to covering cultural and historical heritage and any future prospects for the city. Among the physical representations of urban identity, architectural structure becomes first.

The historic buildings that have reached the present day, they mirror the past not only of the city but also of the people of the city and they provide hints to understand and interpret all the changes and developments that have been made. In this way, the relation of architecture and urban identity, gains a human dimension. Hence, acceptability of new buildings to be built; as much as the city's ancient physical heritage, its harmony with its cultural and historical heritage; by the fact that the people living in the city can address the spirituality.

It is possible to follow the traces of this spirituality in the reactive approaches to contemporary interior and façade designs in the universal dimension, built without emulation of the past. However, when viewed from today's perspective, it is now clear that historical structures, which are now cultural treasures, have iconic qualities for their periods.

In this study, cities that are changing due to globalization supporting multiculturalism, and the influence of modern architecture; besides their identities that are tried to gain international dimension will be discussed. In this process, the impact of branding on the urban economy and the various design examples from World is also involved in the study.

Keywords: Art History, Architecture, Iconic Structures, Urban Identity, Branding

1. INTRODUCTION

Answering the question of "What is a city" by saying it is natural or artificial environment conditions in which human communities live together and perceiving a city only as physical environment is nothing but a shallow definition that leads to loss of meaning. The act of perceiving a city is only possible by considering the identity elements originating from natural and human environments as a whole and evaluating these within a continuity from the past (Es, 2007: 48). This definition includes all the steps that are taken to keep the past alive, to evaluate today, and to implement the plans for the future.

The way in which a culture sees itself and how it describes itself can be understood by looking at public architecture. Public architecture, fed from a combination of values that society attaches importance to, is also concerned with how that society wants to present itself to others. In short, it is the branding of the society, the city, and the country on a larger scale, embodied in architecture (Sudjic, 2013: 10).

When talking about the iconic approach in architecture, what is meant is structures with a traditionalist attitude that contain features of the past, however, based on this rhetoric, it is wrong to see iconic structures merely as products of an imitative style. In the case of iconic architecture, although the architect designs a building inspired by the entirety or certain elements of previous periods, trends or works of art, the creativity and originality in the resulting product are first-hand determinants of iconic structures. The irony here is the inverse

relation between creativity and originality, which is the fundamental principle of design, and basing architecture in the past, the fundamental principle of iconic architecture. However, dynamics of simulated models that visually or imaginatively focus on the past such as the necessity of attaching a function appropriate to the purpose of construction, and the necessity of conformity to the overall design affect the success of the work. Therefore, the architectural solutions at the point where the visual and the meaning attached to the structure are combined with the function brings about originality and creativity.

Another important feature that characterizes iconic structures is that they are symbolic buildings of a city. Within the competitive environment in a globalizing world, cities' efforts to bring themselves into prominence have made architecture an important tool. There are many iconic buildings that reflect the material and spiritual values of a city, that immediately come to mind when the name of the city is mentioned, and even surpass the identity of the city and become global symbols. The Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Giza Pyramids in Egypt, the Opera House in Sydney, the Big Ben Clock Tower in London, the Empire State Building in New York and the Lotus Temple in India/New Delhi are just a few among hundreds of examples. These artifacts continue to exist as cultural values and play an important role in the marketing of the city they are famous for. Today, the desire to see historical artifacts, which has an important place among the criteria of people visiting a city or region, is now combined with the desire to learn about new, different and symbolic structures. Thus, symbolic structures have a positive effect on the tourism of the city or of the country, and hence the economy (Ovacik, 2010: 48). Undoubtedly, this situation encourages the state or institutions to construct such buildings, organize contests for such projects, and include items in specifications –which act as guidelines to shape design– that guide architects towards iconic structures. As a result, the number of structures that are considered iconic or symbolic is increasing day by day.

2. ICONIC STRUCTURES AND CITY

2.1. Firsts and coincidental successes

From a historical perspective, it seems that the level of admissibility of iconic structures in the period when they were constructed is not at the same level compared to present day. For example, the Sydney Opera House, the design of Danish architect Jorn Utzon who won the competition held in Australia in 1957, is at the forefront of examples that come to mind when we talk about iconic structures today. However, the Opera House, with its architectural arrangement based on concrete shell system, could not present the strong aesthetic emphasis in its design in the structural sense; and it has brought along a chain of problems in terms of the basic indicators of architectural success such as economy, space use, timing and labor. The construction work was given to another technical group, Utzon was included in that team, and the architectural solution of the shell system, which the designer had not been able to build in any way, was tried to be overcome in this way. In addition, the number of seats was reduced by rearranging interior space in order to fit the auditoriums into the existing building (Sudjic, 2013: 11). Despite the problems arising from the difficulty and unusualness of the design as well as the inexperience of the architect, the facade appearance of the building has overcome all the negativities and etched its place in our memories as a symbolic structure of the city. Today, the city of Sydney and the opera house are integrated with each other, and when one is mentioned, it immediately suggests the other.

Perhaps it would be more logical at this point to divide iconic structures in two categories:

- A.** Coincidental successes that eventually become a symbol,
- B.** Iconic structures as a means of providing identity to a city.

Another prominent structure we can include in the first category is the Eiffel Tower, which was built in Paris as the gateway to the Expo 1889 fair. When it was first constructed, it received a lot of criticism and was ridiculed. The fact that the 300 meters high structure, which was initially allowed to stand erect only for 20 years, was suitable for communication was an important factor for the structure which was supposed to be dismantled in 1909 to reach present day. Of course, it should not be overlooked that as thousands of people visited The Eiffel even before its opening, most of the money spent on its construction was recovered. Completion of Eiffel on time and attracting 2 million visitors in the first year is another success (Rondal, 2006:636). Today, Eiffel continues to exist as an architectural example that expresses Paris and even France. Nowadays, the idea of dismantling the tower is completely discarded, and efforts are ongoing to keep the giant iron structure alive for a foreseeable future.

The Eiffel was not the last of these kinds of productions. The Atomium, constructed in the capital of Belgium for Expo 1958, is another structure that was planned to remain during the fair, like Eiffel, but due to the extreme interest it received, it was decided to be kept permanently at the end of the initial 6 month period. Designed by the Belgian engineer André Waterkeyn, the Atomium has the shape of an iron molecule, 165 billion times enlarged, and symbolizes the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the importance attached to the future of knowledge (d'Oplinter, 1957: 6). Atomium attracting interest beyond expectations and becoming a tourist hotspot resulted in providing function to the apparatus consisting of nine spheres. Today, in addition to the restaurant located in the top most sphere, one sphere can be used in school activities, and three spheres can be rented for special events. There is also a souvenir shop in the structure, which requires an entrance fee. The work, which was set to be presented at the World Fair as a symbol of modern Brussels, turned into a trademark that characterized the entire country just like other examples and proved its success. In addition to the reputation and prestige, this iconic structure attracts a high number of tourists per year, and thanks to the income obtained, also makes considerable economical contributions to the city.

The three works mentioned above are just some of the examples that demonstrate how iconic structures have a promotional and distinctive character not only for a city but also a country. The identity effects of iconic structures have now reached national dimensions, exceeding the urban scale. Therefore, given the role of iconic structures in determining the identity of countries they are located in, it would not be wrong to say that the influences of iconic artifacts have exceeded the urban scale, and they are now national brands.

2.2. Iconic structures as a means of providing identity to a city

Within the dynamics of branding as discussed above, the second step of the above-mentioned iconic structure distinction has come to life as a systematic and conscious symbolic construction, far from coincidence. The most general and well-known approaches we encounter at this point are about bringing forward the already existing cultural heritage, as it is in centuries-old settlements on geographies with deep historical roots. Sometimes this is about reviving lost values, like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The fact that the museum, which was designed as an economic development project rather than a cultural movement, responded quickly to its main purpose of construction proves the correctness of the decision taken. The economic collapse and unemployment that followed the closure of the shipyard in Bilbao in the 1980s inflicted a massive blow to the once wealthy and prosperous city. While Bilbao was at the edge of social conflict, violence and economic depression, companies in the city began to leave the region one by one. When a flood disaster in 1983 buried the city under industrially polluted water, the government decided to revitalize the city and launched a regeneration program as a means of this revitalization. Perhaps the most

crucial point of the revitalization program was the art museum on the shores of the Nervon River, intended to be an icon for tourism (Gayret, 2010: 357). Gehry had to incorporate the existing elements of the city into the museum to receive the approval of the design committee, and by doing so the new Guggenheim could immediately pass on the splendor of the city's busiest public space. The museum is located in such a way that it overlooks the cityscape, industrial elements and the Nervon River, and also connects the hills on either side of the river. The museum's plan reflects the concept of a "village of form" in which a single building is divided into numerous small pieces and then linked together by a unifying element. Designed by Gehry, construction of the museum started in 1991 and continued for 5 years until it was completed in 1996. In the end, the city was revitalized and Bilbao, which became an attractive city for tourists, began to be visited by people all around the world. Such that, Bilbao Guggenheim, a complete success story, has introduced the term "Bilbao Effect" to the literature.

Another approach in conscious branding is about building iconic structures in order to create a new identity in a particular region that can be accepted on a universal scale. These kind of architectural movements that are considered within the scope of arts and cultural actions actually remain within the dynamics of the global market in the context of the relation between purpose and result. Increasing investments in the city and raising tourism income are primary objectives (Akturan and Oğuztimur, 2016: 119). Branding, which is a necessity in the context of efforts to raise the economic development and competitiveness of cities and countries, brought with it the necessity of symbols to express the brand. Iconic structures, also called icons, which are part of architectural actions that are important tools for the reflection of these symbols in physical life, have claimed an important position in cultural marketing.

Dubai is one of the best examples of iconic structures built to create an identity acceptable on a universal scale through architectural movements and their positive effects on urban promotion and national economy. Dubai, the second largest city in UAE, is the most cosmopolitan city in the Gulf, as well as being economically free. Located between Europe and the Far East, at the crossroads of ancient Arab trade routes, Dubai is an entrepreneurial city that tries to abolish its dependence on oil and explore its capabilities as a merchant city. However, the amount of petroleum income, which has been an important economic factor for a long time, is shrinking and now oil accounts for only 18% of total income. For this reason, tourism is a well played card for Dubai to take the place of oil, which is the main economic income (Boussaa, 2014: 175). Compared to other cities in the region, Dubai is equipped with hotels, entertainment centers and shopping facilities to host a large number of tourists. The aim of these equipments is to try to come to the forefront with designs that can appeal to the interest and liking of people from all over the world. Going beyond the building scale in terms of iconic architecture and branding approach, Dubai offers a holistic iconic planning within the city and region. Assuming its new and modern appearance with the designs of numerous workshops, including Zaha Hadid and Tom Wright, which created iconic structures, the indicator of success for Dubai lies in how it strengthens its economy through the perception of wealth and luxury while the traditional identity of the city is also valued and envisaged. For example, in architect Tom Wright's vision of Burj Al Arab, the hotel building resembling a sailing boat is homage to Dubai's maritime and fishing history. In this respect, the iconic structure makes a historical reference but it also evokes the idea of a luxurious holiday in the subconscious of the people -when considering the seaside location and the splendor of the hotel building on which the sailboat model is applied.

3. CONCLUSION

There is a misperception about globalization, where world-wide cultural and social rapprochements and coalescence are foreseen, that it is in an effort to create a common and unified world culture. However, globalization in the cultural sense is based not on world domination by a single culture, but on the principle that each culture is equally recognized by others and widespread. The phenomenon we refer to as global culture stands out in its aspects that are based on multilingualism and multiculturalism, which enable different cultures to recognize and understand each other, and to bring them together rather than alienating each other. In the context of urban identity, the integrative nature of global approaches cannot be denied, but at the same time the impact of global competition on cities is also visibly important.

“The new roles of cities, which are articulated as cities are integrated to the global economy and emerge as “the most fundamental functional engine of economy”, have forced them to express themselves in global markets with brand-new paradigms and arguments. One of these concepts is competitiveness. As expressed in countless academic studies on globalization and its effects on cities, the phenomenon of competitiveness exists not only among firms but also among countries, regions and cities (Akturan and Oğuztimur, 2016:118)”.

Now, cities are beginning to be remembered with their iconic structures, which cover all types of architectural products, including showrooms, restaurants, as well as houses of worship, museums, universities, libraries and courthouse buildings. In this context, sometimes the design of a library and the layout of the shelves rather than the quality of the books inside, or the interior decorations of restaurants or their locations that push the possibilities instead of the taste of the food in the menu stand out and attract people. The distinctive, recognizable, and easily perceivable characteristics of cities characterized by icons and symbols reveal the importance of physical structure in the formation of urban image (Lynch, 1960: 10). In this respect, iconic structures greatly support the promotion and development of regions in which they are located.

In conclusion, it is an important criterion that the works are constructed in accordance with the requirements of their own periods and they are shaped as a result of the conditions of the era so that they can acquire artistic characteristics as structures that are characterized as historical buildings. Throughout history, the competitive environment created and evolved as a result of political, religious or economic –as it is today– rivalries between cities and countries has been accompanied by architectural movements aimed at demonstrating the power of the regions they are located in and the governments to which they belong, and has produced many magnificent architectural products that have reached present day. Today, urban branding supported by many social and cultural motivations, particularly the economy, and iconic building models that directly serve branding appear as a product of the expectations of the age. With the same thought, and in the context of responding to the requirements of the present day, it is logical to arrive at the conclusion that iconic structures of today that were constructed with the idea of being icons of a city but received negative reactions will be examples that make up the repertoire of the products of architectural heritage.

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