

Selling the City Through “Postmodern” Landscapes: The Case of Global Chain Hotel Design In Istanbul

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I. INTRODUCTION

Current economic and technological restructurings have given way to a new world order characterized by globalization. In this new order, cities are in an intense competition to attract mobile capital to ensure the well being of their populations. One major source of this mobile capital is coming from global travellers that travel to cities for leisure and business. In order to attract these global travellers, city governments and private sector are increasingly engaged in city marketing activities. In these marketing activities local culture and history are seen as sources of innovative marketing strategies. Built environment, as being a medium for the city marketing activities is also being reshaped by the integration of local cultural and historical values. This reshaping gives way to the discussions on the emergence of “postmodern city”.

In attracting global travellers to cities, hotels play a major role. Contemporary hotels are not only the “home away from home” for these travellers, but they have also become temporary offices, meeting and entertainment places. In this environment defined by international flow of capital, global hotel chains represent a big portion of the hotel market in major world cities. In order to stay competitive, global hotel chains are in an effort to strengthen their competitive advantages. One visible strategy in this regard has been to convert the historical landmark buildings in the major world cities into corporate chain hotels. This strategy also contributes to the discussions on the emergence of “postmodern city”.

II. “SELLING THE CITY” THROUGH POSTMODERN LANDSCAPES

Starting in the late 1960’s, due to technological advances, manufacturing production has started to be undertaken around the world, eliminating the importance of proximity of the markets to the labour pools (Short and Kim 1998). This new

economic restructuring gave way to the emergence of the concept of “globalization”. As Short and Kim (1998) suggests, apart from traditional manufacturing activities, new high-tech industries emerged in the world cities, which are more concerned with access to information than closeness to the source. These knowledge-driven, high-tech industries have great place-flexibility. This flexibility in location was also supported by the growing pool of mobile capital, which is coming from tourists, conventions, and especially from transnational corporations that locate their offices in those cities (Short and Kim 1998).

According to Paddison (1993), as a result of this new economic restructuring world cities are now competing against each other to attract investment, improve their image and well being of their populations. In academic literature, these efforts of cities are commonly referred to as “selling the city” (Kearns and Philo 1993, Ashworth and Voogd 1990). In the competitive environment that today’s cities are in, promotion activities have become tremendously important. Barke and Harrop (1994) mention that almost every city now has its series of promotional pamphlets, posters, and other cultural products communicating selective images of the city as an attractive, hospitable, and vibrant international city (Barke and Harrop 1994¹). Kearns and Philo (1993, 3) demonstrate that in the selling of cities, there is a manipulation of culture in an effort to promote the image of the cities. According to these authors, in this incorporation of culture, employment of historical images and values has a significant role. In this respect, one way to utilize history takes place in the form of the planned adoption of the historical references, specifically architectural references, in the built environment to convey a “cosy and familiar” image. Kearns and Philo argue that this form of the incorporation of the historical references of built environment in the practice of “selling the cities” differs from the modernist approach and it initiates the discussions of “postmodernism” in the city and in its architecture.

The contemporary era shaped by global interconnectedness has led to important debates between different commentators. In terms of these debates, Keyman (1997, 123) demonstrates that two questions are salient: whether or not the present is constituted by a significant turning point in history and whether or not what is happening now marks the emergence of the condition of postmodernity. In the case of cities and their built environments, Kearns and Philo (1993, 21) suggest that architects and planners of the contemporary cities are operating with a deliberate notion of creating "postmodern landscapes". In this postmodern architecture, heterogeneity dominates homogeneity and there is an eclectic perspective that combines different styles, materials, and references. According to Charles Jencks (1986²) postmodernism is combining a selection from a past repertoire of styles with the modern practices, thus producing an "eclectic mixture" of any tradition with immediate past. Holcomb (1993, 141) argues that the rise of the practice of "selling places" can be incorporated in the postmodern perspective with its embrace of place, appeal to the unique attractions of particular locations, and its passionate text.

Although, postmodernism seems to become a dominant approach in city promotion activities, there are important criticisms directed towards this approach. Postmodernism in built environment is accused of "scissoring" different elements from their social, political, or historic contexts and "gluing" them back together to create a particular image, thus this way postmodernism decontextualizes those elements (Kearns and Philo 1993, 23). Crilley (1993, 235) mentions that leading advocates of postmodernism such as Scott Brown and Jencks argue that architects gather their imagery from the results of market research and variety of "taste cultures" and "semiotic groupings" and they reflect these experiences to their designs in the form of eclecticism of styles, vernacular traditions, historicist motives, and exotic allusions. This approach of architects results in buildings to become enormous outdoor advertisements for selling the city. The surface appearance and visual effects become the most important aspects in these huge "billboard" buildings and public is seen as the passive consumers of these visual images (Crilley 1993, 237).

In the light of the above arguments, it can be concluded that for "selling the cities" based on its history and culture, the postmodern architecture in the city have become an advertising medium that reflects the "friendly, cosy atmosphere", "the cultural richness", and "the historic values" of the particular city to appeal to different tastes and attract different visitors. Thus, the identification of different actors that take part in the production of built environment becomes a very important factor in city marketing activities. According to Gottdiener (1995, 120), "the production of buildings always involves an articulation between the instrumentality of power and/or profit taking and aesthetic design practices that expresses the sign function of the producers. Implicit in this practice, may also be

designs composed with a particular consumer market in mind such as chain restaurants, theme malls, and theme restaurants." Global chain hotels may also be added to this list.

Although the postmodern approach can be illustrated through different elements in the built environment, in this paper the choice will be the global chain hotels because these hotels are the temporary homes to the target groups of "selling the city" activities. The next section will discuss the global hotel chains and the developments in their architecture. This discussion will pave the way to the specific case studies on two chain hotels in Istanbul, Turkey. With these case studies, the aim is to elaborate the discussion on postmodernist perspectives in city marketing and their effects on urban structure.

III. GLOBAL CHAIN HOTELS³

Kearns and Philo (1993, 3) argue that the foremost concern in the practice of selling the places and cities involve persuading economic enterprises to locate themselves in this particular place and positioning these places and cities among the top tourist attractions. Attracting these travellers and tourists require certain kind of infrastructures that will satisfy the needs of these global travellers. Hotels come to scene at this point. Hotels are the temporary homes for these global travellers. In his book, "New Hotels for Global Nomads", Donald Albercht (2002, 8) argues that "as tourism and travel have become an integral part of people's social and economic lifestyles, hotels have been transformed into crossroads of our nomadic society".

The hotel is not a new concept and nor is the global travel. Throughout the history of the mankind, for different purposes like trade and discovery, people have traveled to different lands. The travelers in early history did not have the luxury of today's technology; therefore they had to spend months, or maybe years, on the roads. The hotel business was developed to provide accommodations for these travelers on the road. *Hans* and *kervansarays* of the Ottomans for the Silk Road travelers and the inns or boarding-houses of England are all examples of ancestors of the modern hotel concept that provided accommodation for travelers on the roads (Oner 2003, 37).

The history of the modern hotel concept in the urban context goes back to the political changes in the Western World in the early nineteenth century. As a result of American and French revolutions, the aristocracy declined and bourgeoisie class became dominant. This group introduced a new concept, leisure time that led to the rise of the tourism industry. Around the same time cities like London, Paris, New York, and soon Tokyo have started to grow to become major metropolises. In these cities, new types of buildings emerged for new ways of living and doing business. In this regard, hotels became the places to accommodate the growing mobility of the populations as well as to provide public arenas; they were the fantasy world

that provided escape from the realities of the everyday life (Collins 2001).

Albrecht (2002) mentions that at around 1900, an American businessman, Ellsworth Milton Statler launched a hotel chain under his name that especially met the needs of the traveling salesmen with convention facilities, meeting rooms, and subdivided lobbies for business groups. Statler chain hotels demonstrated that the national hotel chain idea is in fact a profitable business due to the economies of scale in advertising, reservation, cash management, and large quantity purchase of furniture and other supplies. Although Statler Hotels started as a national chain, after World War II, increase of air travel opened new horizons for the hotel business. Now the global expansion was a reasonable strategy. In 1954, Statler Hotels were purchased by Hilton International by being one of the largest real-estate transactions in history (\$111 million), which signified that the hotels were big businesses meaning they are international chains (Albrecht 2002). According to Albrecht (2002, 21), these chain hotels became very successful because they enjoyed the repeat visits from customers by offering a constant product under a trademarked name, which allowed customers to find similar accommodation all over the world, while helping hotels with great savings from replicated designs and operating systems. Today, throughout the world's cities, there are many hotels available to the global travellers. A considerable portion of these hotels belong to different global chains, which attempt to fulfil all the basic needs of their global guests including internet connection, different cuisines, and highly developed conference facilities under a well-established brand name (Oner 2003).

Between the 1960s and 1980s, as a response to the increased global travel, many global chain hotels were built in different cities. Under the influence of modernism, the architecture of these hotels mostly followed a uniform approach (McMillan 2002). Although, these hotels belonged to different chains, with this architectural standardization, they seemed as they belonged to one big chain (Ibelings 1998). Albrecht demonstrates that (2002, 21), these chain hotels became successful because they encouraged repeat visits from customers by offering a constant product under a trademarked name, which allowed customers to find similar accommodation all over the world, while helping hotels with great savings from replicated designs and operating systems. In this era of standardization, if included (as in Hilton Hotels) the local characteristics remained as minor touches in the interior design, in order to prove that these hotels are "good neighbors" to the local community (Albrecht 2002), however most of the time they were not included at all. Since the 1990s, this standardized uniform approach of global hotel chains has begun to change (McMillan 2002, Riewoldt 1998). Riewoldt (1998) argues, "Until recently the global hotel chains were not noted for respecting local cultural traditions... this is beginning to change... The seriousness of this change of approach is evidenced by alliances with local architects and the use of local

craft workers: authenticity has become a marketing tool" (Riewoldt 1998, 9).

Most of the time hotels provide an important part of the first and the last images of the city that the visitor experiences. The city marketing efforts to attract global travellers led to the increase in the number of hotels in those cities and it also expanded the market for customers. In the city marketing activities, the new hotel became a symbol of the city's economic and cultural coming-of-age (Albrecht 2002, 10) and for this reason city governments also encouraged new hotel developments. As a result, as well as global chain hotels; the number of national chain hotels, and privately owned hotels in the major world cities increased; thus giving rise to the competition between the hotels. As in any competition, in order to outperform their competitors, hotels have to prove their customers that they are the right choices and they are better and unique compared to their competitors. This means that hotels should create strong competitive advantages⁴ (Oner 2003). As mentioned in Riewoldt's argument, authenticity in design has become an important strategy among hotels as a way to achieve competitive advantage.

The most striking form of this authenticity is the one that is done through historical landmark buildings being purchased or rent by corporate hotels. These corporate chains then convert these buildings into luxurious fantasy hotels. This change provides a very powerful and unique marketing tool for the city and the hotel and it is likely to be welcomed by certain groups in city governments and business community because of the promotional advantages it brings to the city. Although these hotels still remain as landmarks, there are certain major changes that this shift in use brings to the urban life. First of all, the landmarks as hotels have introverted social atmosphere that is usually separate from the city culture. Secondly, these landmark buildings become no more public properties, but they turn out to be commodified cultural objects. Thirdly, these fantasy hotels serve to high-income groups and this aspect limits their approachability of landmarks among general public. According to Robert Venturi⁵, by claiming to achieve aesthetic populism, "postmodernists aimed to break with the formative disjuncture between high and mass forms of culture created by modernists". Jameson⁶ demonstrates that the new postmodernist buildings do not aim to insert an elevated language into the city fabric, but rather reflect mass tastes by seeking vernacularism. However, the landmark hotels constitute a contrary case to the claim of these authors. According to Lipman⁷ despite its populist claims, postmodern architecture still remains elitist and under the control of global capitalism, in this regard the example of global chain hotels support Lipman's claim. On the other hand, Gottdiener (1995) is skeptical about postmodernism and he argues that the modernist ideology is still alive in the contemporary architecture of the cities.

After this theoretical background, it is important to examine and illustrate the postmodern landscapes formed by the global chain hotels. In this regard, this paper focuses on Istanbul, Turkey. Istanbul is chosen as the context because as the economic capital of Turkey, the city is the gateway for international entrepreneurs coming to Turkey and it is in the process of strengthening its geopolitical and economic position in the region. As a result of this effort, the city marketing activities in Istanbul has gained high momentum. In Istanbul, as corporate chain hotels, two hotels will be examined: Four Seasons Istanbul (a former Ottoman Prison) and Çırağan Palace Hotel – Kempinski (a former Ottoman Palace). Both hotels are remains from the Ottoman Empire and they are important historical landmarks of the city. In the case studies, the hotels will be examined in terms of their symbiotic relationship with the culture and history of Istanbul and their contributions to the emergence of postmodern landscapes in the city.

IV. ISTANBUL — BRIDGE BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE

Istanbul has been one of the greatest cities of the world for almost two millennia (Walker and Taylor 1999). The most important reason for this argument is that Istanbul was the capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires for more than fifteen hundred years (Keyder 1999, 3). Istanbul was initially designed by Constantine the Great to be a world center, and it later became the largest city in medieval Europe with 1 million inhabitants (El-Shakhs and Shoshekes 1998). Today, with a population of approximately 15 million, Istanbul is the economic capital of Turkey and the only city that serves as a bridge between Asia and Europe (Sinclair and Oner 2003).

Walker and Taylor (1999) demonstrate that Istanbul's importance results from its location on the Bosphorus where it has been a cultural and economic crossroads both between the



Fig. 1. Çırağan Kempinski from the Garden (Source: www.ciragan-palace.com).

Black Sea and the Mediterranean and between Europe and Asia. For almost two centuries, Istanbul has been in relative decline as the world political changes have not been beneficial to cosmopolitan centers in traditional empires (Walker and Taylor 1999). However, as Bartu mentions, in the 1980s; there was an important city marketing effort in Istanbul in order to make the city to regain its world city status. In this marketing campaign, there were many urban renewal projects and Istanbul's image as being "the East in the West, and the West in the East" and "gateway to the orient" was promoted to market the city to the investors and tourists (Bartu 2001, 136). Nevertheless, the real change in the process of regaining Istanbul's status as a world city occurred in the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War there became new opportunities for Istanbul's geopolitical position. Istanbul is now in the process of regaining its former glory and become the real bridge between the East and the West (Walker and Taylor 1999). In this process, city marketing activities are very important and in action in Istanbul.

Resulting from the geopolitical importance of Istanbul as crossroads between Asia and Europe, being the formal imperial capitals of two powerful empires and being the economic capital of Turkish Republic, Istanbul receives tremendous amount of business travelers and tourists. In this market of many global travelers, almost every global hotel chain in the world has extended their operations to Istanbul. These hotels extensively use the rich culture and history of the city in their marketing strategies. Among these hotels, two of them stand out as historical landmarks with their "authentic design": Çırağan Palace (a former Ottoman Palace) and Four Seasons Istanbul (a former Ottoman Prison).

a) Çırağan Palace Hotel — Kempinski:

Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski, which is located in the city center of Istanbul, is actually two hotels: The restored Sultan Palace and a grand hotel built on the gardens of the palace that is decorated in the spirit of its traditional neighbor. Nigogos Balyan, who was the royal architect for Sultan Abdulaziz, constructed the palace section in 1874. Artists were sent to Spain and North Africa to make drawings of the famous buildings. After Abdulaziz, Sultan Murat V lived in Çırağan. Actually Sultan Murat V was held prisoner in this palace. In 1909, the palace was destroyed except for its stone shell after a fire. In 1946, the building was given to Istanbul Municipality. An Abu Dhabi based firm bought the building from Istanbul Municipality, and then it was bought by Kempinski Hotels. The palace was hand-made renovated by local craft workers and in the garden of the palace; additional hotel section was built (Hotel Information Booklet).

Palace contains 12 luxury suits and conference and meeting facilities. The renovation of the palace stayed loyal to its predecessor. Hotel part has 284 rooms and 20 suites. The hotel

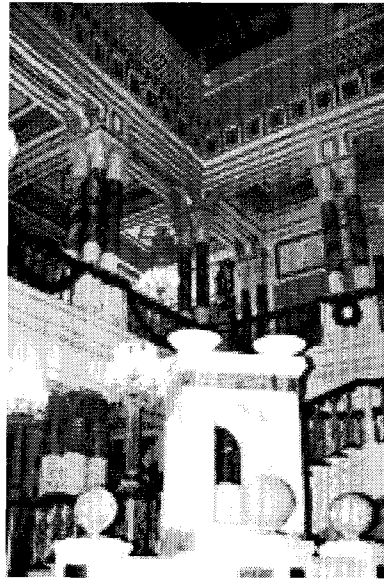
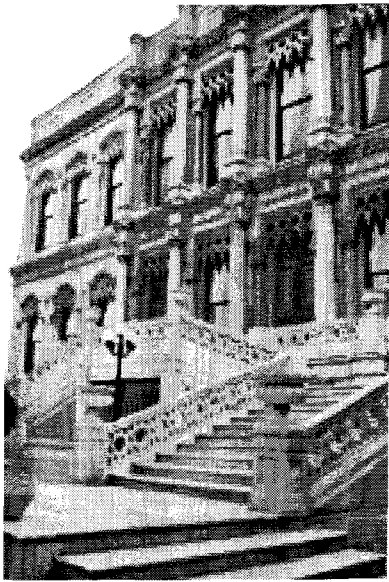


Fig. 2. The Palace Section (Photos by author).

part was constructed and finished in the beginning of 1990s and with the height and material use in the facade it stayed respectful to the grand palace.

When driving or passing by from the European shores of Bosphorus, it is impossible to miss Çırağan Palace Hotel with its monumentality and historic architecture. Çırağan Palace Hotel is considered to be among “the most luxurious five-star hotels in the world” and it is a popular staying place for the economically well-off guests of Istanbul. Kempinski Hotel Chains promote Çırağan extensively through its historic and cultural significance. This is evident in the promotional statements of the hotel:

“The Çırağan Palace, once the residence of the last Ottoman Sultans, has been restored to its former glory and is the only luxury hotel on the European shores of the Bosphorus. It offers the perfect combination of Turkey’s great tradition of hospitality with five-star standards.”
(www.cyragan-palace.com)

Çırağan Palace is important in promotional activities of the city because it is considered to be among the few places where you can actually touch and be a part of history. With its beautiful architecture Çırağan has always been a landmark for Istanbul. However, it is a fact that after its conversion into a hotel, Çırağan’s “landmark” identity has fallen behind of its “luxurious hotel” identity.

b) Four Seasons Istanbul:

“Welcome to Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul. Created from a century old-neoclassic Turkish prison in the core of this fabled city- steps from the Blue Mosque and Topkapi Palace.” (www.fourseasons.com)

The Four Seasons Hotel was constructed in 1917, as a prison shortly before the collapse of Ottoman Empire. This prison is now converted into a five-star hotel for Four Seasons global chain, based on the design elements drawn from Turkish culture and architecture (Collins 2001). A Turkish architect, Yalcin Ozuekren and interior designer Sinan Kafadar made the conversion possible. The exterior design retained much of its

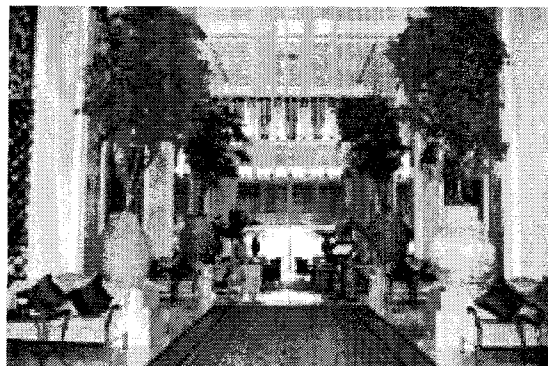
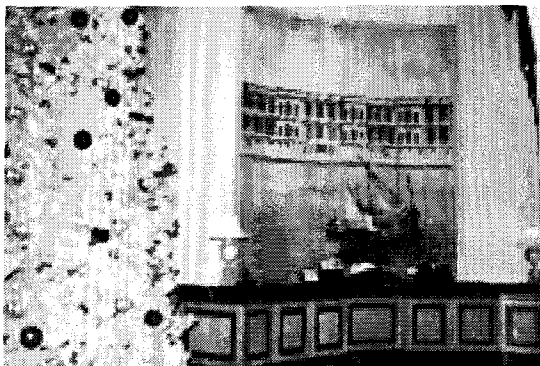


Fig. 3. The hotel section (Photos by Author).



Fig. 4. The hotel exterior facade (left and view from the courtyard (right)). (Source: www.fourseasons.com).

character. Additions of blue and white Iznik tiles and occasional stonework softened the neoclassical solid prison facade. Many of the old room arrangements and entrances were unchanged or were carefully modified, in suits some walls were removed (Collins 2001).

The interior designer Sinan Kafadar outlines the principles behind the interior design as authentic atmosphere, local craftsmanship, interior design fitting the architecture, and most importantly reminding the guests where they are. The style of late Ottoman and national designs were the main target (Collins 2001). Kafadar also mentions that he also was very careful in creating an authentic atmosphere where the design and decoration do not force themselves on people because the guests might be overwhelmed, especially tourists who will be tired after a day's sight seeing. In the interior design of the hotel, the design materials are Turkish, such as the marbles, wood, and iron. The paintwork is done in the same technique as in the Ottoman times. There is a lot of play with geometric

Ottoman motives. On the other hand, there are international touches specifically in furniture in the lobby, bar and restaurant (Sinan Kafadar in Peppiatt 1997). There are 65 suits surrounding an open courtyard. The hotel is situated in one of the major tourist sites near to Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque and it is in close distance to major business district.

It was an important event for Istanbul to be hosting a hotel converted from a prison. The media attraction has made this subject even more interesting for the public. After the completion of the hotel, an important part of the guest attraction was due to the hotel's past as a prison. As a former prison, the building has an introverted design. This aspect of the design may be thought as constituting an interesting character of the hotel. The hotel is located in the Sultanahmet area, which is a very important historic part of the city. With its introverted design the hotel does not give a big clue about its current function. However, once one passes the entryway and enters into the hotel, a different world opens up characterized by



Fig. 5. Hotel Interior (Source: www.fourseasons.com).

“five-star luxury”. Although the Ottoman touch is visible, the interior design and the furniture offer the same level of comfort arrangements that can be found in any five-star global chain hotel worldwide. It is almost like the building itself has become the threshold between the historical and the contemporary; and in this relationship history and culture are the promotional tools in favor of the contemporary.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, in terms of defining the postmodern we placed the emphasis on the definition of Kearns and Philo (1993), who suggest that cultural and historical elements are important tools that are used in city marketing efforts. The incorporation of culture and history is a very different approach than the modernist one; therefore it initiates the discussions on the postmodern city. One of the important claims of postmodernism is to create an aesthetic populism. However; following Lipman, the examination of global hotel chains has shown us that the kind of postmodernism emerging in cities through city marketing activities is far from aesthetic populism and it still has an elitist approach. Thus, it can be concluded that the characteristics of postmodern landscapes emerging in cities is a question open to debate.

Culture and history are unique characteristics specific to place. In city marketing activities mostly these unique characteristics become commodities. The idea behind the city marketing activities is based on attracting investment and resources for the well being of the city; and this investment mostly comes through global business travelers and tourists. Therefore, the global travelers are important for cities. The importance of the hotels arises at this point. Hotels as being the “home away from home” for travelers are under the direct influence of city marketing activities as well as the ideologies behind these activities. As we have demonstrated with the case studies, in Istanbul these ideologies are in elitist forms and culture and history are utilized as promotional tools.

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NOTES

¹ In Hall 1998.

² In Kearns 1993, 88.

³ The rest of this paper is inspired by the author's master thesis in 2003 Fall submitted to Ball State University, Department of Architecture under the

name of "Integration of Local Cultural Values in Global Hotel Design". Parts III and IV are mainly taken from the master thesis.

⁴ Competitive advantage is a term derived from business.

⁵ In Gottdiener 1995, 122.

⁶ In Gottdiener 1995, 122.

⁷ In Gottdiener 1995, 129.