NEW ARCHITECTURAL ICONS OF THE COMPETITIVE ERA

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ABSTRACT

Production of space has always been a multi-dimensional phenomenon for various disciplines. This multi-dimensional nature; including politics, technology, sociology, economy etc. of this phenomenon creates a fertile tool for understanding 21st century's world.

Architecture, the discipline of spatial production also embodies the creation of meaning for both individuals and communities. This comprehensiveness of architecture has always given it an active role for building and making visible the dynamics that shape the world.

In the light of this, in order to understand the today's world, architecture serves as a key tool in means of both production of space and production of conflicting meanings. Since neoliberalism is used for defining the major impetus beginning from 20th century, how are the spaces/places and meanings change under this impetus is a worth-asking question.

Following this question, taking architecture and production of space under the effects of neoliberalism as a focus point, the term "non-spaces" which first enounced by Augé (Augé, 1995) can give us a general idea about the spaces of today's milieu. Augé used this term generally for describing spaces like airports, highways and shopping malls etc. that represent emptiness and give no chance for establishing meaningful bonds.

Taking a step further; this paper aims to discuss the role of architecture as a key component for competing cities through production of space following neoliberal urban politics. In this point of view, can architectural icons with similar functions such as culture, sports or other international events, created by star architects, help us to enlarge the scope of "non-spaces?" is the basic question of this paper.

The paper will be based on the theories of neoliberal urban politics and the role of architecture in creating meaning and rationalizing these politics in competitive cities. Secondly, new functions and the role of star architects will be focused through these theories. Following these discussions, examples of mega-projects, both built and unbuilt, of some star architects will be opened to discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Space and place are two main terms being used in all languages in order to define the relationship between human and their environments. Although these terms are usually confused with each other in different languages and in daily use, they point to important transformation processes and difference within their aspects of spatiality and meanings attached. In general terms, it can be said that; space becomes a place when people build a relation with it and attach a meaning to it.

Space is the keyword for architecture as founding its roots on spatial configuration. The practice of architecture basically can be defined as the organization of different functions for different needs. Within this point; the main question of the architect is the question of "how". But within this process, the architect also designs the social networks which will complete or never be able to complete the generation of that space, the generation that transforms the space to a place. Geographical and social configuration is shaped by various factors and decisions from spatial boundaries as lines on maps to regions, cities, squares, streets and to building scale. All these boundaries are actually the symbolic traces of expansions, segregations, convergences and struggles for sovereignty. Following this, it can be said that, the practice of architecture embodies all of the dynamics that shape the world such as technology, psychology, sociology, politics and economy as the discipline of spatial and social configuration. An attempt to follow architectural products in order to understand the dynamics that shape today's world reveals some keywords such as globalization neoliberalism, iconic architecture, commodification, urban competition, star architects and global capitalism.

In order to describe today's world, the most common term used in different disciplines is globalization.

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The concept of globalization that is frequently referred in order to describe the world since 1970's can be described as a concept that corresponds to the process of world transforming into a global village and

boundaries becoming both sharpened and ambiguous. Referring to concepts such as speed, locality, change, diversity and embodying two-way conflicts, substantially it can be formalized as a milieu of today that is shaped by neoliberal economies and flow of capital, services, people and information. These changes that are underlined within the context of globalization can be traced back to Industrial Revolution. Industrial Revolution, and the modernization process that is described as **" an incomplete project "** by Habermas, points to a social World that reflects the effects of revolution in daily life while representing a new period that is built by economic and technological developments. (Habermas, 1997) This process embodies both the period of a change accelerated by scientific and technological developments and the period of an alienation of the individual who is trying to adopt herself to this rapid change. Tomlinson describes globalization as a fertile concept for its capacity of producing metaphors, powerful social imaginations, assumptions and speculations that go beyond simple social realities. (Tomlinson, 2004)

Cities and Architecture in a Global Milieu
Based on general concepts mentioned above and Henri Lefebvre's description of space as being both a product and a prior condition of social processes, it can be said that the process of space production and its results are both the tools and symbols of power and struggle possibilities. Doubtlessly, cities are the spaces where these interactions and production networks become visible. (Lefebvre, 1991)

Cities have been the most important actors/objects/subjects of the vital breaking points in the world history. Beginning from the Industrial Revolution, with the rapid increase in urban population and industrial settings, forms of mass production and consumption attitudes, cities have been shaped under the effect of seek for solutions for emerging wide-range urban problems such as dwelling, health conditions, infrastructure and poverty. Suburban settings, social housing projects have been the most common solutions for these problems especially around Europe. When we come to the globalization period that can be dated back to 1970's as Daniel Bell conceptualizes; the Industrial Revolution has ended and a new type of economy and parallel to this economy a new social structure and an ideological context has emerged. (Bell, 1973) This new type of economy which is called neo-liberalism has shifted its activity from industrial production to urban investments that are seemed to be fertile areas for speculative income. Compatible with this approach, Yalcintan and colleagues describe global cities as the temples of neoliberalism where the over-accumulation of the capital is being directed. (Yalcintan et.al, 2014) As David Harvey, who built most of his studies on urban dynamics, discusses, these urban investments of capital over-accumulation has determined the growth of cities and this tendency has become a process of modernization dream and a condition of development for underdeveloped countries. (Harvey, 1997) Sasskia Sassen, as a social scientist, embraces the concept of global city as a product of new labor division created by global capitalism and economic mobility. In her book titled Global City (1991) in which she examined New York, London and Tokyo; she reveals that the economic interaction that is accelerated at 1980's and the changing concentration from industrial production to finance and service industries has deeply affected the economic and spatial configuration of cities. According to Sassen, global cities have four different new functions beyond their historical character of hosting banking and trade facilities. These are;

• Headquarters of companies that dominate the world economy
• Key locations of finance and private service industries
• Innovation centers of these new industries
• Market for these new products, innovations and services. (Sassen, 1991)

Within this world economy and global cities approach, most of the cities have become a part of a competition for being a center of attraction for global investments.

Using five dynamics; business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience and political engagement, A.T. Kearney's latest in-depth analysis of global cities named **Global Cities 2015: The Race Accelerates** reports that more than half of the world's population lives in cities and by 2025, that number is projected to reach 60 percent. (A.T. Kearney 2015) Similarly, **World Urbanization Prospects Report**, prepared by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, indicates the increase in urban population and its distribution. *"In today's increasingly global and interconnected world, over half of the world's population (54 percent) now lives in urban areas, up from 30 per cent in 1950. The coming decades will bring further profound changes to the size and spatial distribution of the global population such that the world's population in 2050 is projected to be 66 per cent urban. The global urban population is projected to grow by 2.5 billion urban dwellers between 2014 and 2050, with nearly 90 per cent of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa."* (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division 2015)

Future predictions and tangible contemporary data on cities clearly show the risks about the physical and natural sustainability of the planet. While neoliberal politics and global capitalism is expanding over all countries and creating global networks in all means within a search of development and innovation; adverse

effects such as displacement, mass migration, unemployment and deepening conflicts shape both the spatial and social aura of the cities. , it is possible to say that the global cities are representing the world of images that are expanding, being marketed and growing in a global competition while hosting the world of segregations, conflicts and oppositions. The reflections of these opposition and representations make cities fertile laboratories by both transforming and being transformed.

Figure 1. New York & London. (NYC Photo: Anthony Quintano; London Photo: Daniel Chapma)

Going back to the conceptualizations on space and place; interrelating and attaching meanings to spaces, in other terms, the process of space becoming a place is manipulated/precluded within a culture in which economic development and global competition is of top priority. Since culture can be described as set of meanings, it is an important point that a global culture is one of the most important points that effect the relation between human and its built environment. There are various and opposing conceptualizations on global culture. Anthony King classifies these different approaches as;

• Emphasizing plurality and spatializations
• Emphasizing the deconstruction of the nation state
• Emphasizing (American) cultural imperialism
• Emphasizing a new (or in some cases 'homogenized') system of culture
• 'Out of this world': Emphasizing the planetary (King, 2004, p. 26-27)

Anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) proclaims that; supermodernity, which is the description of today's world, produces spaces that are not places. According to him, these non-places are not meaningful forms of existence but temporary and soulless geometries. Non-places such as travel, consumption and transition points are lack of meaning, experience and practice and in these spaces the relationship between individual and the space coalesces with alienation, loneliness and abandonment. (Augé, 1995) According to Ibelings, high-rise buildings as described by Walter Gropius *'One day there will be a worldview and then there will also be its sign, its crystal– architecture'* that emerged simultaneously in different countries and defined as International style in 1932 can be seen as the first examples of homogenization process that is frequently pronounced for globalization. Starting from 1950's, trans-national office buildings, airports, shopping malls, as indicators of the expansion of global capital, has been playing active roles in shaping the scene and culture of cities. Ibelings, referring to Marc Augé's non-places concept, says that these big scaled spaces reflect an important aspect of globalization by being spaces where people feel no attachment and belonging. (Ibelings, 1998)

In the light of these approaches and conceptualizations, the practice and potential of architecture, being transformed by all the dynamics and aspects of globalization, empowers its network and gains new roles as hosting various intersecting actors and disciplines. Anthony King, remarks the changes in the nature of architectural production as a part of globalization process;

"A cluster of developments has globalized the nature of architectural production: internationalization of images, trade, information, technology, recently accelerated by revolutionary communications facilities: … internet, CADCAM design methods and the dispersal of design expertise worldwide and the increasing frequency of international competitions." (King, 2004, p. 41)

Within the boundaries becoming ambiguous, acceleration in the mobility of information, people, images, capital and products; similar to all transnational investments and services, expanding network and new division of labor in architectural services have caused both an increase in the popularity of architecture as a tool/mediator and in the importance of new icons and star architects.

Icons and Stars as the New Tools/Mediators

Since creating attraction points, big infrastructure and development investments and architectural and engineering products have always been important for cities which want to play an active role in global system, some more specific tools and methods have seen to be used starting from 1980's in order to in the accelerating competition between global cities. With the flow of images, information and labor, every city is in the rivalry of attracting the capital, tourism and the investments of transnational companies. Ponzini, describes this situation by his determination that cultural attraction centers that are empowered by garish designs and performances of starchitects are started to be used as a tool that triggers urban development. (Ponzini, 2011) Creating new spaces of globalism seeking to take part in the global flow, this urban transformation attempt that is called as urban boosterism frequently use the method of creating attractive images using all means of design and star architects. According to Sklair, those driving urban boosterism deliberately attempt to create urban architectural icons in order to draw tourists, convention and mega-event attendees with money to spend and the images they project are directed to this end. (Sklair, 2006) Since marketing is one of the most important sectors of the capitalist economy, marketing strategies of the cities in the global competition forces local authorities for new projects and investments. It can be said that global cities and transnational investments are the driving powers of countries after the decline of nation-states. At this point, popularly known architects and their star image becomes an important tool for both marketing the cities and justifying the decision-making processes which contain both private and public authorities. Sklair, name these star architects as **cosmopolitan iconic architects** and describe them as essential elements in the marketing strategies of globalizing urban growth coalitions. (Sklair, 2010) Similarly, Sorkin, remark these international architects as crucial ingredients for urban regeneration, for marketing new projects, real estate products and for re-imaging declining cities. (Sorkin, 2005) A report narrated by Tanaka in the beginning of January 2013, residences in buildings in New York City, designed by big-name architects tend to sell more than similar units in buildings designed by less-known architects is a good example showing the attractive force of star architects in marketing real-estate products. (Tanaka, 2013)

Conceptualizing globalization as a process configured by complementary dynamics including technological, political, cultural and economic factors; some new recent vintage functions such as mega events, shopping malls and new meanings to ever present facilities such as art, sports and specific attraction points commonly represent and make visible the cultural ideology of consumerism. Within this ideology; buildings, experiences, images and brands are artifacts of consumption in addition to tangible merchandising.

In the Oxford Dictionary, the word icon is described as a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol or as worthy of veneration. Beyond its literal meaning, according to Sklair, the iconicity in architecture emerges as a resource in struggles for meaning and used for the implication of power. Extending this potential, Sklair reveals that the images of iconic architecture are tools to persuade people to buy the buildings and spaces and lifestyles and in some cases, the architects they present. Reviewing the iconicity in architecture in the milieu of globalization Sklair indicates that buildings, spaces and architects are iconic to the extent that they symbolize the variegated fruits of the culture-ideology of consumerism. (Sklair, 2006)

Figure 2. Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao designed by starchitect Frank Gehry (1997)

In this context; Bilbao Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Gehry, opened in 1997, can be seen as the first attempt reaching its goal and also generating the term "Bilbao Effect" for subsequent attempts. This development/urban boosterism plan is produced after Spain joined the EU in 1986, in order to revitalize the city of Bilbao which was a center for industrial production but lost its charm due to the economic decline. This project has been an inspiration for many other urban development plans causing a term commonly used

"Bilbao Effect" by reaching its economic goals. The criterion for this economic success is the number of visitors who had brought 100million€ tax income during the three years after the opening of the museum. This tax income amount was over the amount needed to cover the expenses. A new terminal for Bilbao airport (2000) and a pedestrian bridge (1997) designed by Santiago Calatrava and Bilbao Metro (1995) designed by Norman Foster are other starchitect projects accomplished in order to revitalize the city of Bilbao as a tourism attraction center.

The inspiration titled "Bilbao Effect" is not limited to the scale of urban development processes but also remarks the position of architectural practice as a tool or mediator for urban branding and economic rising goals. As Dovey indicates *"Like corporations without logos, cities without icons are not in the market.",* the role of the architecture as an icon becomes prominent. (Dovey, 1999) In this new role of architectural practice, the name of the architect and her star position, gains importance as a part of marketing the cities in the global competition. The determination of vice-mayor of Bilbao saying *"good architecture is not enough anymore: to seduce we need names"* gives us a good example for this marketing process. (Gonzalez, 2006)

In this process, taking architectural practices and architects themselves as the mediators of the urban boosterism it is possible to pronounce the emergence of new geographies that are shaped by cities rather than nation-states. Adam describes this change with the priority of attempts that aim the compatibility with global codes, differentiation and to take part in the competition through creating attractive power. (Adam, 2008) Taking into account the emergence of these new geographies, Akay suggests that the life of postmodern community started to move us from a western centered world. According to Akay, eastern cities such as Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi are like the extensions of new contemporary art fairs, new cultural centers and new markets in the period of the globalization of art and 2008 economic regression. (Akay, 2013)

One of the most outstanding examples of these cities and project is the Saadiyat Island Project in Abu Dhabi which is in the process of creating about thirty hotels, three marinas, 8000 villas and 38,000 housing units along twenty kilometers of coastline with a 28 billion dollars investment. The project includes the creation of a Cultural District as an icon in the international scene. This mega-project can be evaluated as the most assertive project of Abu Dhabi's politics that move its investments to superior tourism, culture and entertainment spaces in order to play an active role in the competition in between gulf countries and to diversify its oil economy. The statement of one of the public officers, quoted by Adhan, clearly manifests the motivation of Saadiyat Island Project: *'Abu Dhabi is trying to use international contemporary architecture in order to express the newborn identity of the UAE nation: 'Abu Dhabi is a global capital city'*. (Adhan, 2008)

The Cultural District which is one of the seven regions of Saadiyat Island and recently under construction is promoted as the live canvas for global culture, drawing local, regional and international visitors with unique exhibitions, permanent collections, productions and performances.

Figure 3. Saadiyat Cultural District image showing the iconic buildings of starchitects

In order to realize this promotion, the project contacted and selected Frank Gehry for the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum, Jean Nouvel for the Louvre, Zaha Hadid for the Performing Arts Centre and Tadao Ando for the Maritime Museum. Norman Foster was selected for the Sheikh Zayed National Museum in a competition with other twelve firms. This iconic itself mega-project as being a unique example of incisive collaboration of architecture, urban marketing and star architects also embodies the national identity within a global perspective. This nation-identity feature can be interpreted as a tool for creating a difference in an international image. Ponzini, remarks this feature as a contradiction and says that; *"The symbolic dimension of the Cultural District and many other large-scale projects is linked to the image of the nation and strengthened by the artistic aura of international iconic architecture in a contradictory way."* (Ponzini, 2011)

In a similar way of taking art and culture as an investment project in the competition of global cities, sport events are also seen as an inviting opportunity for gaining a global role. The economic opportunities given by Olympics for urban boosterism, creating a new stock of images; increased the motivation of cities, which aim to solve its urban problems and to accelerate the economic growth, in the competition of hosting the games. Just as big budget cultural projects created to attract the flow of tourists and big amounts of income, these new cathedrals of sport described by Sklair provide many good examples of the links between iconic architecture and consumerism. (Sklair, 2010) Another glamor of mega sports events such as Olympics is the opportunity of proving the adequacy of the host city as becoming a global city.

Figure 4. 'Bird's Nest' the National Stadium of Beijing for 2008 Olympics designed by Herzog & de Meuron

This point of view motivated China for being a willing candidate for the Olympics. After losing its candidate status for 1993 Olympics and losing the competition with only two votes in 2000, China directed all of its effort to 2008 Olympics. By the help of big campaigns and huge public support China won the right for hosting 2008 Olympics under the slogan of Big Games: New Beijing. In order to represent the perfect combination of this big event and the new Beijing, an international architectural competition has been announced by the Municipality of Beijing Planning Commission at 2002. Swedish architects Herzog & de Meuron were the winners of this competition in which famous architects such as Dominique Perrault, Rem Koolhaas, Jean Nouvel and Kisho Kurokawa participated.

China, as being an effective candidate in the cities of global capitalism, with its attempt of Beijing National Stadium, seems to embrace the starchitect feature of building that symbolizes the changing face of its national identity as a part of this change. Triggering many discussions about the budget, the competition and the construction phase, Beijing National Stadium is recently in use for some football matches and waiting to host 2022 Winter Olympics.

Discussion

All the dichotomies of the globalization have its reflections on the space. Bauman describes this process that is determined by change, speed and capital as forcing factors with this statement: *"Most probably, the last quarter of this century will go down in history as the Big War of Independence counteracting for space."* According to Bauman's statement, it can be said that this independence war is going through identity representations, power struggles and meanings.

Looking at the outstanding architectural examples of today and their discourses within a perspective of space-place relations and meaning processes, some questions worth to seek for the answers occur. Since people need to build meaningful relation with their environments and this process is a part of the culture; capitalist priorities seem to manipulate this process. Architecture, being the discipline of creating spatial configurations in which social life is built, the role of this potential has to be questioned under the circumstances of global capitalist competition. Can this potential of architecture become a tool for creating places for human not only for capital promotion? Such a point of view predicts the necessity of the ethical responsibility of architecture that has the mission of producing livable and sustainable environments for everybody in a planet that is on the verge of its natural resources.

Harvey's congruent statement and question points out to the point of view of this paper: *"in this imposed collage of spatial images, identity of place emerges as an important matter because everybody occupies a significant space of personality such as a body, room, house, a society or a nation and the way we build our personality shape the identity. Beyond this, if nobody knows her/his own place in this changing collage world, how is it possible to constitute a trustful social order and how can it be sustained?"* (Harvey, 2007)

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