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City Branding and Identity

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Abstract

The well-being and satisfaction of citizens and visitors are strongly influenced by the image of a city or place, to which monumental or iconic buildings have a great contribution. The paper aims to discuss the influence of iconic architecture through creating identifiable images on Quality of life. The paper, firstly, puts forward very briefly the concepts of City Identity and Branding with an emphasis on city image, which is limited to the contribution of iconic buildings. Secondly, the paper discusses the contribution of iconic buildings through their meaning in terms of the image of the city to QOL.

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1. Introduction

In recent years cities are in search for new ways to promote themselves. Due to fast changes in technology and the shift from local to a globalized environment, cities are forced to compete with each other in order to be an attractive tourist destination, workplace, cultural rich place and much more (Kotler,

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2002). Kavaratzis argues that the rising competition among cities might be seen as one of the effects of the globalization, which is visible in various forms and activity fields (Kavaratzis, 2005, p. 1). The contemporary city has to be up dated continuously. In that sense cities develop strategies to support, to 'sell' and advertise them within the global market. Literature survey reveals that there are mainly three approaches for promoting cities: cultural mega events, restoration and promoting heritage and the construction of iconic buildings (Hankinson, 2006, p.240; Kavaratzis, 2005, p.1). Among these approaches, construction of iconic buildings has been extensively utilized by many cities in order to get attention and attraction. The main motive behind this attempt is to create an identifiable image.

It should also be noted that the restless competition between cities is strongly related to the concept of Quality of Life (QOL), which can briefly be defined as: 'Quality of Life is a feeling of well-being, fulfilment, or satisfaction on the part of residents or visitors to a place' (Andrews, 2001, p.202). Existing studies (Bigne' et al., 2001; Petrick; Chen et al.; Chi et al.) confirm a positive relationship between image and satisfaction of visitors/tourists. A strong and identifiable image would have a positive impact on the satisfaction of the visitors. Since iconic buildings have a great contribution to the identifiable image of a city or place (Jencks, 2005, p.185), it can be suggested that they can indirectly influence the feeling of well-being and satisfaction of residents and visitors, thus there is a relationship between the image of place and QOL. Accordingly, this paper aims to question the influence of iconic architecture through creating identifiable images on Quality of life. In order to justify the relationship between the image of the city and QOL, the paper firstly, puts forward very briefly the concepts of City Identity and Branding with an emphasis on the city image, which is limited to the contribution of iconic buildings. Secondly, the paper discusses the contribution of iconic buildings through their meaning in terms of the image of the city to QOL.

2. Relationship between City Image and QOL

Before discussing the relationship between city image and QOL, it is worth to highlight the concepts of identity and city branding, since for both the image of the city is an indispensable attribute.

Lynch (1960) defines identity as "the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places". Accordingly, identity is distinction which is obvious and visible at first sight, as well as strong as creating images on people's mind even who haven't seen it before. Therefore, identity is always exclusive and not reproducible. Each city has a unique identity, which is composed of images and memories that are either negative or positive. The image of the city is composed of the view of urban elements such as monumental buildings, public spaces and other special features.

When discussing the image of the city from city branding perspective, it should be noted firstly that nowadays, many cities attempt to promote themselves through the aid of iconic artefacts. From a general point of view, city branding is mainly based on three key attributes, which are image, uniqueness and authenticity. Nearly every city has city branding on its agenda in order to redevelop its image (Kavaratzis, 2007). Branding, mainly developed from marketing strategies, is more and more used for city marketing and promotion, similar to products. Kotler even argues, that 'places are products whose identities and values must be designed and marketed' as products (Kotler, et al., 1999). According to Ashworth one of the objectives of city or place branding is to discover or create uniqueness, which makes the city differentiable from others (Ashworth, 2009,p.9). The main aim in construction of brands for cities is the articulation of the city in the globalized world. If a city claims to 'work' successful it needs economical wealth and an attractive image. Thus, city branding has to be concerned with 'how culture and history, economic growth and social development, infrastructure and architecture, landscape and environment, among other things, can be combined into a saleable identity that is acceptable to all people.' (Zhang ,2009,p.248). As a holistic approach city branding serves as a promotion tool for creating a unique image

of a city. Accordingly, the image of the city can be considered as one of the most important key concerns both for city identity as well as city branding.

Based on what has been stated above, it can be suggested that the concept of image can be best interpreted at the intersection of city branding and city identity (Fig.1), since image is an indispensable part of both. Additionally, it can also be suggested that the image itself, in one way or the other, has an influence on QOL, since in addition to economic and social factors, it is also highly related to the built environment issue (Derek et al.,1999).

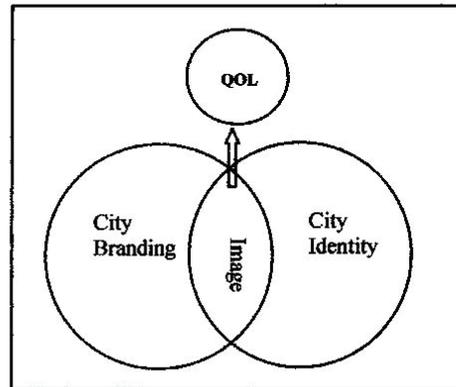


Fig 1. Relating Image to City Branding, City Identity and QOL

According to Rogerson, Quality of life issues are also concerned with Place promotion and city marketing in order to attract capital (Rogerson,1999, p.969). Moreover, Harvey states that the impact of Quality of Life 'in the process of capturing or ensnaring capital lies in the arena of place promotion and marketing, being part of the attempts by cities to forge distinctive images and atmospheres which "act as a lure to both capital and people 'of the right sort' (i.e. wealthy and influential)' (Harvey, 1989, p. 295). Thus, City Identity and city branding are linked together through the practice of place promotion tools through images that has an impact on QOL. As this paper will be limited to the impact of iconic architecture to the city image, in the following lines some selected examples of iconic buildings will introduced and discussed with consideration of their contribution to the QOL.

3. Selected Examples

Four iconic buildings have been selected, which are well-known and have a strong image. The examples include Frank O` Ghery's 'Dancing House', the Louvre Pyramid in Paris, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and Swiss Re Office building. The buildings will be discussed with a focus on their contribution to the physical character, thus the image, through consideration of the spatial character such as siting and massing; and consideration of the visual character such as scale, proportion, rhythm and material (Oc, 2008,p.78). Based on the evaluation of the buildings according to these criteria, the buildings might be either successfully integrated to the existing context, or fail to do so. Successful integration would have a positive contribution to the image of the city, which would in turn positively affect the wellbeing of the visitors, thus QOL.

3.1. 'The Dancing House' by Frank O'Ghery

The so-called 'Dancing House' or 'Ginger and Fred' building in Prague designed by Frank O'Ghery in 1996 is an example of an iconic infill project. Gehry's Dancing House is situated in the old part of the city of Prague in an environment with buildings from different periods. It is designed in a visual contrasting approach to the existing tissue as an outstanding remarkable icon. Considering the siting of the building on the corner plot, it is a contrasting approach towards the street line of the other buildings. The columns seem to extend towards the street; the volume of the building is in contrast to the existing tissue. On the other hand, considering the use of material and proportions of the windows, the building is integrated in a contextual manner. The building is a contemporary interpretation of the neighbouring buildings as it is following the order of the historical façade. It is a harmonious, but contrasting relation to the environment. (M.Rıza et al, 2011) Accordingly, from physical point of view, the building is successfully integrated, tailor-made for this site and creating an eye-catching appearance for the people. Thus, the image of the building is successful and has a positive impact to the QOL.



Fig. 2. 'Dancing House' by Frank O'Ghery (source: M.Fasli)

3.2. Louvre Pyramid by I.M.Pei

The Louvre Pyramid is placed in the courtyard of the Louvre Museum, serving as the new entrance, surrounded by the three wings of the museum (Fig.3). The architect I. M. Pei built it in 1989 in order to modernize and extend the Louvre museum. The aim was to enlarge the Louvre Museum with an underground building, which should serve as a bridge between the wings of the Louvre Museum (Cerver, 2003, p.294). The glass pyramid creates a visual attractive contrast to the existing historical Museum. When evaluating the new building in terms of its visual character it can be argued that its placement is integrated into the courtyard of the previous palace. It leaves enough space to access and perceive the existing buildings. The massing of the glass pyramid is in contrast to the existing volume of the historic surrounding. However, through its reduced height and volume as well as its transparency it is responding and enhancing the existing tissue. (M.Rıza et.al, 2011).The scale of the building is also appropriate as it referring to the scale of the surrounding monumental buildings, even though it is huge, concerning the human scale. In terms of rhythm and proportion it is contrasting the existing tissue as the visible part of the new museum is a simple geometric form; a pyramid, which is not related to the other urban elements

in the surrounding. The used material creates an attractive image against the massive surrounding. Following the arguments of Cantacuzino, that simplicity of the form is a quality, which creates visual harmony with the context (Cantacuzino in Warren et al., 1998, p.89), thus the transparent pyramid is successfully integrated into the vicinity from physical point of view. Hence, the image of this iconic building is an enhancing contributor to the existing tissue. Even though it is an iconic building, as it is unique and outstanding, it is considering the given context without diminishing the image of the existing tissue and contributing to the image of the space. Accordingly, it is affecting the QOL of the visitors and citizens in a positive way as its image is successfully contributing to the context.



Fig.3. The Louvre Pyramid (source: S.Hoskara)

3.3. *The Guggenheim Museum by Frank O’Ghery*

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, built in 1996 by Frank O’Ghery, is situated at the Riverside of the Nerivon River in the Basque city Bilbao in Spain. The location is a former shipyard, which was in use in the 19th century. The museum is connected to the old city of Bilbao through a bridge, characterized through its waving roof lines, reflecting the natural setting of the mountain and the river (Nero, 2000, p. 13). The museum is an iconic building as it is exceptional, but on the other site dominating the surrounding. Taking into account the above set criteria for evaluating the physical character of the building, the Bilbao museum is not fitting to the context in terms of spatial or visual point of view. It is a free style building, ignoring the existing environment, as it is contrasting the environment without respect or enhancement (M.Rıza, et.al.2011); against the previously discussed examples. Taking it out of its context, it could be placed randomly on any location in the world. Even though Bilbao gained economic wealth and transformed to an attractive tourist destination after the construction of the Guggenheim Museum (Plaza, 2007), if discussed from the contribution of the physical character point of view, the image is not successful, as it has no reference to and no respect to the existing tissue. Therefore, even though its positive contribution to the social and economic aspects of QOL, it has a negative impact on the QOL from physical character perspective.

3.4. Swiss Re Office building by Norman Foster

The Swiss Re office building by Norman Foster (2003) (Fig.4a), nicknamed the ‘Gherkin’, is situated in London, in an urban context surrounded by mainly low rise buildings from different periods. It is a high-tech building out of steel and glass, with an extraordinary shape. Similar to the above mentioned example, the tall building is massive and outstanding, dominating the existing surrounding with its height, mass and form. The image of the ‘Gherkin’ is contradicting the given urban context. As Jencks noticed, ‘the internal space and structure’ is more convincing than the context to the city (Jencks, 2003). It gives neither any reference to the existing buildings in its vicinity nor to the location at all. Wood is arguing, that a ‘tall building is obviously not a typology to ‘blend in’ with its context’. According to him, the Swiss Re tower could have been built anywhere in the world as an ‘existing edifices of steel and glass. ‘(Wood, 2004, p.230). Following these arguments, it can be stated that the Swiss Re Office building is not contributing to the physical character of the environment. Comparing Norman Fosters building with the Agbar Tower (Fig.4b) built by Jean Nouvel, it is obvious that they represent the same image, a global image which has no local or contextual reference. The Swiss Re building has a replaceable image, thus, it is not enhancing the QOL from the physical character point of view.



Fig.4.(a)Swiss Re Office building by Norman Foster (source:M.Rıza) (b)The Agbar Tower by Jean Nouvel (source: B.Koprulugil)

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, modern societies are using iconic buildings to be admired and to develop significance in the globalized world. Iconic buildings are tools to communicate as status symbols of the city and attract visitors. Thus, visually attractive iconic buildings turn out to play a major role in promoting the city and its image.

As it is seen in the context of the selected examples, iconic architecture is influencing the image of cities either positively or negatively. Consequently, the QOL is affected as it has been attempted to be questioned through the selected buildings above, which have been evaluated in terms of spatial and visual characteristics. The findings clarify that the ‘Dancing House’ designed by Frank O’Ghery, and the Louvre

Pyramid of I. M. Pei have a positive impact on the QOL as they are fitting well to the existing context. On the other hand, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is a non-contextual approach, neglecting the existing context and diminishing the value of the immediate surroundings. Similarly, the Swiss Re Office building with its reproducible image is not considering the existing context or location. For that reason, both have an adverse influence on the QOL, since they do not contribute to the image of the city.

Iconic architecture is part of the contemporary city and its image and identity. Therefore in order to create and sustain identity, the buildings should be designed with a consideration of contextual harmony, representing and respecting the character of that place. Iconic architecture can just be an appropriate tool for city branding if the building is not reproducible, but context sensitive. It should not be forgotten, that cities are unique organisms which have their own identity formed and affected by people, social, natural and manmade factors as well as many other effects (Faslı, 2010). When evaluating all these arguments from the QOL perspective, it can be stated that the well-being of the citizens and visitors would be negatively affected through anonymous identity and replaceable images.

In this context, in order to support the above mentioned arguments, this paper concludes with a description of an imaginary city by Italo Calvino in his book ‘The invisible cities’:

‘If on arriving at Trude I had not read the city's name written in big letters, I would have thought I was landing at the same airport from which I had taken off. The downtown streets displayed the same goods, packages, signs that had not changed at all. I already knew the hotel where I happened to be lodged . . . The world is covered by a sole Trude, which does not begin and does not end. Only the name of the airport changes ‘. (Calvino, 1985, p. 102).

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