

CONSUMING CULTURAL HERITAGE: TOURISM AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE CASE OF TURKEY’S MINIATURK THEME PARK

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this paper is to explore the cultural identity of heritage sites and its relations with the formation of the image of Turkey in international tourism after the 1980s. The heritage industry has recently generated in Turkey a whole industry in conversation, restoration, collecting, antique dealing and tourism. Miniaturk, which is the case study of this paper, is an example of the modern heritage museums called “theme parks.” In the light of this perspective, this paper analyzes the changing vision of the cultural policy in heritage tourism as directly related to the projection of a modern society image that coincides with the European integration process. The displaying strategy of cultural heritage is directly conducted within the framework multi-culturalism, neo-Ottomanism, and industrialization of culture in Turkey. Considering the cultural policy in Turkey, Miniaturk is a recent example of the post-modern museum structure, which will be analyzed in terms of commodification of cultural goods and heritage industry.

Keywords: tourism, cultural policy, national identity, cultural heritage

Kültürel Mirasın Tüketimi: Miniaturk Örneği Üzerinden Türk Kültür Turizmi ve Politikasının İncelenmesi

ÖZET

Çalışmanın temel amacı, kültürel mirasın yeniden kazanımı kapsamında yürütülen kültürel kimlik politikalarının Türk turizmini uluslararası platformlarda nasıl etkilediğini incelemektir. Kültürel mirasın yeniden üretilerek özellikle yabancı turizmi canlandırmak amacıyla sunulması yapılan bu üretimin bir anlamda tüketime dönüşmesini beraberinde getirmektedir. Literatürde yer alan genel kavramların izinden giden bu çalışmada İstanbul Miniaturk Tema Parkı örneği ele alınacaktır. 1980 sonrasında gündeme gelen kültürel mirasın korunması ve post-modern müzelerin kurulması gibi konular kapsamında “tema parkları” olarak adlandırılan ve kültürel mirasın yeniden üretildiği merkezler bu çalışmada incelenecektir. Türkiye’nin kültür politikasının yeni vizyonunun kültürel miras yönetimine ve turizmüne yaptığı katkı Avrupa Birliği uyum sürecinin getirdiği değişimlerle birlikte ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: turizm, kültür politikası, milli kimlik, kültürel miras

Introduction: Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Starting from the 2000s, the central government in Turkey and local governments and municipalities in big cities have been pursuing global tourism through various types of cultural heritage protection projects. With the flow of international tourists, such historic cities as Istanbul, Izmir, and Antalya have become popular sites; Ottoman art and culture has evolved into a means of self-esteem for the citizens of the Turkish Republic in many ways but it has also acted a means of communication and cultural tourism in a world where social values and condition change extremely fast. Cultural tourism shows both the modern and traditional faces as well as the positive image of Turkey. Cultural heritage is employed in the development of tourism projects. History is used as a first hand material to generate ideologies and visions. Tourism sells those visions. In this sense, there can be a shift in the contextualization of the Turkish heritage tourism in the 2000s. It shows a transformation of national character to a multinational one in the cultural heritage promotion.

Through the weakening of the boundaries of the nation state, the people enlarged their vision about world art and history. The power relation in the visual space of the post-modern museum, heritage sites and theme parks were partly different from the modern practices in that it reflected transnational corporate networks“ concerns for symbolic power and multicultural identities.

By the 1980s the flourishing of heritage exhibitions concentrated on alternative and multiple memories of individuals and subgroups whose histories had not been represented earlier. The cultural heritage practices and the heritage industry mainly in Western Europe and the USA were widespread by the 1970s and 1980s. Cultural heritage appears to have emerged with the motivation of the preservation and conservation of historical places and monuments as well as displaying them in the exhibition spaces. The basic reason behind the preservation of the past was to give a sense of the present; because the negative influence of the past ever-present modern life sometimes eradicates the sense of the past.

The contemporary age introduces new technologies in cultural /heritage tourism. The concept of theme parks is the reflection of post-modern museums; it enables the movement of tourists and information both rapidly and easily. The basic characteristic of the exhibition space is that the reproduced models in the exhibition area produce a

distinctive narration and a new practice of memory for the selective remembrance. Urry mentions that timeless construction of theme parks is the result of the erasing social realities held on the representations (p.172).

The introduction of new technologies reinforced the idea of leisure time activities in daily life. In addition, the spread of the mobility of information has doubled compared to the mid twentieth century. The information, image, product and ideologies spread faster and the museums and theme parks have become transportation vehicles for visitors with using interactive media technologies. The methods of showing and telling have been transformed into a new interactive structure.

Concerning the exhibition space of theme parks, we can draw on analyze Foucault's (1973) statement in that the order of displayed materials presents the mentality in regard to the construction of the social and cultural values in that society (Foucault, 1973, p.12). Similar to Foucault Sherman and Rogoff (1994) argue that "in the museum space classifying functions through the imposition of order and meaning in objects is only possible through the positing of objects as triggers of ideas." (p.11) In this regard, the global era brings us the marketing and commodification of cultural tourism. In the global era, cultural politics are visualized in museums, theme parks and heritage sites. As a theme park structure, the monuments and the objects in parks generally lose their historical and cultural values and they are de-historicized and de-contextualized. The spatial and temporal constructions in the theme parks in the post-1980s indicate the turn in perceptions of time and space of post modernism. The organization of time and space in the theme parks, embedded in the linear and progressive characteristic of modernity, changed. Thus, the construction of the temporal and spatial are designed in the conditions of the parks rather than following the classic linear and progressive discourse.(Klein,2000, p.218)

Theorist of post-modernism, David Harvey writes that the conditions of the late capitalist society directly affected the time and space in post- modern society. In this way, social geography and temporality in post-modern museum as well as theme parks showed different experiences in different places. (Harvey, 1999, p.7)

The shift realized in the space and time orientation of the exhibition space mapped the visual culture of the 1980s. Cultural policies and governmental techniques that are utilized in museums and theme parks are directly related to contemporary social and

political issues. Everyday politics and marketization of culture is a result of globalization as well as modernity. In this regard, theme parks and cultural centers are one of the most important places where politics and culture become more visible.

In addition, sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that globalization produces the disembedding of culture, “whereby cultural characteristics are transported from local contexts of interaction and restructured across indefinite spans of time and space.” (qtd. by Rojeck, 1998) In this sense, museums, cultural institutions and theme parks illustrate the characteristics of national culture and give the sense of time and space in a certain geography. Organizers of cultural tourism as well as suppliers of tourist services and cultural administrations occupy the realm of the new political practices of power. Miniaturk, which is the case study of this study can show the changing vision of cultural policy in heritage tourism as directly related to the projection of a modern society image coinciding with the European integration process (Ada, 2009).

The Miniaturization and Commodification of Anatolian Cultural Heritage

Miniaturk-Miniature Park of Turkey- covers a larger land area than any miniature city in similar parks. It is Turkey’s first and only miniature city. Cengiz Özdemir, General Manager of Kültür AŞ. (a company which was depended on the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality) presented a project under the title of “New Millennium Projects” to the former Mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Ali Müfit Gürtuna. The Project was found exciting and gave an opportunity for creating a new touristic site in İstanbul. The construction of Miniaturk began on June 30, 2001. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan opened the park to visitors on May 2, 2003. Miniaturk covers a total area of 60,000 square meters. It contains 120 models done in 1/25th scale. 57 of the structures are from Istanbul, 51 are from Anatolia, and 12 are from the Ottoman territories that lie outside Turkey today.

In terms of its geographical location, the Miniaturk exhibition complex is situated on the shore of the Golden Horn, which is a site for nostalgic remembrance of the Ottoman Empire. The Golden Horn was included as a part of the “Cultural Region Project” conducted by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. This project was the first attempt for urban regeneration in Istanbul which began in the 2000s. For this reason, choosing the location of the theme park was a very strategic decision in terms

of urban policy and cultural tourism. Murat Uluğ, the architect of the park said that the park seeks to create a “fairytale-like environment.” (Minyatür mirasa akın, 2003, p.7) In selection of the location of the theme park, the Turing Company played a major role. Turing has been the first private company in Turkey working on renovation of cultural heritage sites and historic buildings. Former Head of Turing, Çelik Gülersoy argues that:

It is a very beneficial enterprise that, the largest city in Turkey, Istanbul, can present all the values of not only the city, but also the interior calling them together, gathering them and presenting them for us. While this is done, an important principle has been observed not to discriminate against any era or culture. This exhibition is held in one corner of the Golden Horn, which is still neglected today in many places. The first thing to do is to start revitalizing the area, especially with the planting of trees, in neighborhoods, both near and far (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2003, p.2).

The physical structure allows a ground for eclectic memory practices. Miniaturk functions as a memory site of the Anatolian cultural heritage, planned as a post-modern exhibition complex in which cultural tourism promotion strategies are developed. For example, foreign companies Philip & Morris and DHL support the renovation of historic buildings and the development of archeology site projects. In this regard, active participation of the private sector in cultural heritage management provided new opportunities and visions for the cultural policy after the 2000s.

Looking at Miniaturk as a post-modern heritage site, the style of Miniaturk is fragmented and non-linear as an illustration of the new developments in heritage exhibitions. In 2003 seventy-five models were listed in the visitor’s guide (thirty-six from Istanbul, thirty one from Anatolia, and eight from abroad). In 2010, the total number of the model rose to one hundred and five. The organization of the theme park shows the eclectic, multicultural and pluralistic vision of the Turkish cultural policy. This is no reference to the formation of the nation-state ideology in its organization. The core ideology of this site is universalism versus the nation-state ideology; it offers visitors an opportunity to feel the multi-cultural character of Turkey. This indicates that the process of integration to the European Union has played a significant role in the making of more global and eclectic cultural projects in terms of cultural and heritage politics.

In the heritage conservation discourse, the heritage sites are used as profit making institutions and instruments for global tourism. Heritage exhibitions and sites are part of the current visualization of history. Before the 1980s, heritage sites were the national of countries showing off their cultural richness. Globalization has often weakened pride national discourses and the conservation of heritage efforts is now based on a more universal discourse titled “world cultural heritage.” As a result of Western universalism, the heritage exhibitions organized in this sense after the 1980s were the showcases of world cultural heritage and the common heritage of human kind.

In Turkey, cultural heritage practices turned into an industry, institutionalized within the framework of the international projects of UNESCO and the MEDA project of the European Commission in the 1980s and 1990s.(Yılmaz, 2005, p.65) These international organizations set the criteria for the historical and cultural assets of the world that would be listed formally and acknowledged. The organization of this common list emphasized historical assets with outstanding universal value. Therefore, the major concern of the protection of historical and cultural assets was whether they carried universal values and were a part of a civilization in world history. This situation shows that heritage conservation politics depended on universal values and goals.

The EU has designated 2008 as Year of Intercultural Dialogue. It means that cultural heritage projects created as a kind of a dialogue with non-EU countries in terms of an interface or an interaction between cultural entities. Cultural projects done by the support of EU can be described as “transnational” and “transcultural”. Considering the latest developments in Turkish heritage projects, the European Union has funded cultural heritage projects, archeological excavations, and renovation of museums in Turkey. These projects brought intellectual development and known-how in the field of conservation and museology. As a result of the intellectual development in the field of cultural heritage management, Miniaturk theme park project was realized in 2003. An article was written in Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*: “Miniaturk has entered ‘the European Union before Turkey has been included as an official member.’” This is an important turning point for the cultural awareness indicating the rising standards of tourism and cultural heritage. Turkish cultural projects realized by

the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and local authorities raised the standards of theme parks, archeological sites, and cultural centers.

In global world, the practices of the conservation of the historical sites reflect the agenda of heritage tourism that promotes a mythical harmony in the global community and a romanticized as well as glamorized past.” (Urry,p.155) In this regard, Miniaturk is a place where the past to the future and traditional understanding of history and culture is converted into a modern time and space orientation.

The main exhibition area of Miniaturk is divided into two exhibition areas of Istanbul and Anatolia. In the opposite side of the Golden Horn, where the right side meets the ground, the Mausoleum of Mevlana is placed as the first model. This monument symbolizes the multi-cultural and multi ethnic characteristic of Anatolia. It also indicates that Mevlana, a well-known figure in the Anatolian cultural heritage, has great importance in representing the cultural richness of Anatolia to foreign people. As a second important model coming from the Ottoman classical era, Selimiye Mosque presents the splendor of the Ottoman heritage and the third, Anıtkabir from the Republican era displays the success of the Turkish architecture and monumentality. The largest part of the Anatolian section of the exhibition emphasizes the Turkish and Islamic identity through models of mosques, castles and houses that belong to this geography. The models also represent both the non-Islamic and non-Turkish items in this section in order to show “Anatolia has been home to many communities.” (Yılmaz, 2005, p.80) Outside the two circulation areas, a third group of models presents a selection of buildings from the “Ottoman Geography.” These models which include the Ecyad Castle in Mecca, Damascus Train Station and, Mostar Bridge in Bosnia- Herzigova, replicate in miniature models the cultural heritage that remain outside the current boundaries of Turkey. These three exhibition structures display the diversity of the cultural wealth of Turkey. The criteria for their selection are their originality and representativeness of the Turkish culture and history.

The IMP (the Cultural Tourism Group of Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design) considered Istanbul’s heritage sites and cultural values as cultural products as follows:

Taken at a national scale, Istanbul possesses the urban vitality, cultural wealth, diversity, historic sites, dynamism, street culture and the young and qualified work force, which are the characteristics of creative cities. Istanbul is,

therefore, rightly considered as Turkey's center with respect to the production and consumption of cultural products. (Ada, 2009, p.109)

In the light of this perspective, the Miniaturk theme park's exhibitions serve: (1) as a cultural commodity with commercial value, (2) a cultural resource with institutional and social value and (3) a symbolic resource for displaying the value of the Anatolian-Turkish culture. Miniaturk as a theme park has collected all the master pieces of the Turkish architecture and become a pure reflection of the Turco-Ottoman synthesis. It also attracts tourists, which provides commercial value for the Turkish tourism and cultural goods.

Considering the structure of Miniaturk, cultural production can be investigated in order to comprehend the social meaning of the exhibition space and its public circulation and consumption. The Miniaturk may be labeled as an example of the "industrialization of culture" (Bendixen, 1997, p.30), in terms of the historical and materials conditions of cultural production. The term industrialization of culture is used to define the commodification of cultural industries. It indicates using historical icons, archeology sites and historical figures for attracting tourists and gaining profit.

Within this framework, in the case of the Miniaturk theme park, the "miniaturization", commodification as well as the consumption of the Turkish archeological and cultural heritage shows us how the cultural heritage is remembered and cultural politics is privatized in line with the neo-liberal symbolism of privatization and tourism marketing strategy. In the last five years, Miniaturk has gained political, economic, and symbolic value in the market place of the commodity culture. Miniaturk has also been used to market the city, but its design and status as a "heritage" site seem to set it in a different orbit (Türel, 2010, p.119).

This complex can be seen as one of the prime sites of the global capital and leisure time activities. It carries the characteristics of global architecture that has been enriched with a variety of recreational areas that consists of a bookshop, a shopping center, a restaurant, a café, a children's play area and a Miniaturk express train. Considering the role of Istanbul in global city marketing, Miniaturk is designed to demonstrate Turkey's tourism competitiveness in the global market place. A book published in 2003 under the title of *A Big Country's Small Models* introduced the Miniaturk theme park, explaining how it was created by examining the other miniature

cities in the world. This is an advertising book showing us how the Miniaturk theme park reflects the post-modern thinking in the construction of a new kind of an artificial heritage site. It also illuminates the differences and similarities of Miniaturk compared to the other examples Disneyland, Alton Towers, Thorpe Parks and in Europe and the USA.

A Big Country's Small Models book is an important outcome in terms of the commercialization of cultural heritage and advertising of cultural tourism. Miniaturk is attractive for the opportunities that are be opened up in terms of marketing the city image as modern, traditional and cosmopolitan place. Miniaturk offers an opportunity to attract tourists and global capital investments into cultural industries. Miniaturk as a marketing brand represents Islamic, secular and business interests of Turkish culture industry.

As a part of the tourism advertising strategy, Miniaturk reflects a desire to show the cultural wealth of Turkey and its image repeatedly in promotional publications. Miniaturk' 2003 brochure shows Ataturk Mausoleum and the Selimiye Mosque together. This indicates that Miniaturk reflects both the Ottoman-Turkish and modern Turkey's cultural heritage. Its 2010 brochure is titled *The Showcase of Turkey* and Ottoman-Turkish, Greco-Roman and Byzantium models on the cover page represent the multicultural vision of Turkey. In the next section, the Miniaturk experience will be analyzed within the framework of Turkish cultural tourism strategy after the 1990s.

Turkish Cultural Tourism Policy in the Light of Global Perspective

In the 1980s, Prime Minister Turgut Özal played a leading role in organizing cultural activities at the international level aimed at promoting the Turkish tourism. The efforts of the Özal government in developing cultural tourism came into reality in 1988, when the number of foreign tourists who visited the Turkish museums exceeded the number of national tourists for the first time. Approximately 500,000 foreign tourists visited Turkish museums as a result of the public relations campaigns in the international arena (Republic of Turkey, 1993, p.43). Heritage tourism¹ (Christou, 2005, p.6) is one type of cultural tourism that was widely used by the Ministry of

¹ Heritage tourism is a phenomenon based on tourists motivations and perceptions rather than on specific site attributes. Heritage tourism is a form of special tourism that offers opportunities to portray the past in the present.

Culture and Tourism in displaying heritage sites, artifacts, and events to draw the attention of foreign tourists.

As a sign of the promotion of tourism in the 1980s, Turkish state officers published hand catalogues on the Turkish history and its cultural heritage hoping that history exhibitions would attract tourists to Turkey. In the tourism catalogues, the cultural richness and modern face of the country provided a positive image for tourism as well as for economic progress:

Turkey today is a young and modern state with a dynamic and creative nation always aware that they were and are the people with the longest tradition of independent states. This is indeed a heritage as valuable as economic strength and a source of confidence as Turks who have made their country quite self sufficient in the last few decades, look to the future with pride and hope. (Republic of Turkey, 1987, p.1)

In the 1990s, the main focus of the collective efforts and activities taking place in the USA was the promotion of Turkey as a unique cultural tourism destination. “Turkey-The Center of World History” and “Turkey-Where Europe Becomes” were the slogans of the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, which they believed would ensure a unique positioning in the market. Some of the headlines that were used in the advertising campaigns in the 1990s are as follows: “Turkey-The World’s Largest Open Air Museum,” “İstanbul-A Fascinating Blend of East and West, Past and Present, Modern and Exotic,” “Turkey- Key to the East, Key to the West,” “This Journey Spans 3.650.000 Days But You Can Do It Ten,” “Turkey-Ageless, Unique, Exciting, Affordable, Friendly, Exotic,” “If You think You’ve Seen the World You’ve Left One Stone Unturned,” “Our Library Hours are Dawn Until Dusk (the Celsius Library in Ephesus),” and “The Architecture is Magnificent, the Hospitality is Divine (the Selimiye Mosque).”(Özhan, 1999, p.839)

The messages delivered in the promotion campaigns emphasized the unique geographical location, long history, diversity, and richness of Anatolia presenting Turkey as a favorite cultural tourism destination. However, the slogans that were used in the promotional campaigns in newspapers and magazines offered a highly exotic and oriental image of Turkey. Apparently, the reason for this promotional strategy was creating travel demands for Turkey. Drawing an exotic image was an easy way to succeed in emphasizing the country’s originality in terms of culture and history. In the

world, the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic image of Turkey was properly marketed as a sustainable tourism product of the 1990s. As can be seen in the titles of the tourism slogans, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism mainly emphasized the cultural wealth of Turkey and the role of the country's land in the making of the civilizations.

Since the 2000s, the growing autonomy of local government offices due to the change in the cultural policy as well as the social and economic policy reforms by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) have played a significant impact on cultural tourism. In the winter 2008 edition of the *New York Times*, the Travel Section printed in a quarter-page advert by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to show Turkey's cultural heritage and to market it abroad. The title of advertising was "Turkey, 24 Hour Open Museum," which has been used to promote tourism in Turkey. The advertisement illustrated the diversity of the cultural resources in Turkey: from Greco-Roman statues, Hellenistic Age monuments, Byzantium Church St. Irene, splendor of Ottoman dynasty, to the Bosphorus Bridge.

Archeologist Gül Pulhan (2009) asked a crucial question: "Which of Turkey's multiple pasts are used to promote tourism?" (p.140) In the case of the advertising campaigns especially in the last five years, Turkey's rich cultural heritage encompasses every age and every geographical region. For example the Balkans and the Middle East directly indicates the nostalgic remembrance of the Ottoman Empire in the global area. Cultural values of the past civilizations are regarded as a part of the Turkish national identity. In the light of this perspective, the Miniaturk theme park can be seen as one of the influential tourism projects of the 2000s that connect the multinational past of Anatolia with the Turkish nation's future. Head of Turkish Advertisers' Association Caner Tunaman (2003) argues the following about the promotion of Istanbul in the case of Miniaturk:

I feel that Miniaturk is a memorial that will teach lessons to many people. Everyone should see how you have managed to spice up tourism, the entertainment world and promotions. I don't know how anyone could have created anything more beneficial for the promotion of Istanbul and the promotion of Turkey. (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2003, p.33)

Istanbul was a starting point of this project, which planned to make a Miniature Turkey, a miniature city that has an emphasis on Istanbul. Such a miniature city would provide Istanbul with a new cultural and touristic complex. Furthermore, Historian,

Prof. Dr. İlber Ortaylı emphasizes the role of Istanbul in the construction of the Miniaturk project as follows:

There are many places like Miniaturk in European cities. But there wasn't one in this 1500 year old world capital. It is impossible not to congratulate this cultural and visual project that introduces and makes people, children and young adults fall in love with this empire and its imperialistic wealth. (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2003, p.17)

Most of the miniature parks are strategically located in the national capitals of countries. For this reason, Ortaylı's statement shows us how a miniature city can be used as a strategy of representing the historic vision of Istanbul. The choice for Istanbul as the European Capital of Culture (ECC) in 2010 gives the city a unique role in the cultural tourism in Turkey. In this regard, Miniaturk reflects a desire to imagine an ideal global city which displays its cultural wealth and influence to the international arena.

Conclusion and Implications

The Miniaturk theme park reflects three basic characteristics of the Turkish cultural policy. The first is the post-modern museum practices (fragmented and timeless museum space), a new trend for Turkish museums. This kind of post modern museum practices makes the models of cultural heritage commodified pieces.

The second is related to the political and economic agenda of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The message in the exhibition space is ““Anatolia: The Coexistence of various cultures and regions at the same time.”” The political agenda of the Turkish governments after the 2000s was to construct the Turkish national identity through tolerance for and, coexistence of religions and cultures. In this regard, representing Anatolia as the homeland of multiculturalism in the Miniaturk exhibition reflects the change in Turkey's tourism policy along with the process of integration to the European Union.

Finally, the nostalgic remembrance of the Ottoman- Turkish identity in monuments and objects is a reflection of neo-Ottomanist political project, which has been represented in Miniaturk as the revival of the Ottoman borders in the surface of the Golden Horn. The displaying strategy of Miniaturk is to reimagine the nineteenth

century Ottoman Empire as a multicultural social structure by geographical references to the former Ottoman boundaries.

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