



Culture-led regeneration of Istanbul waterfront: Golden Horn Cultural Valley Project

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ABSTRACT

The regeneration of declining waterfronts has been one of the crucial tasks of urban policy since the 1970s; whereas culture has become an important theme as means for responding to the socio-economic decline that waterfronts have been facing through the re-functioning of abandoned factories and warehouses, the rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods and the utilization of events and amenities. At the same time, many academics are critical on the attempts to reform post-industrial spaces of consumption in creating privatized spaces and commodified cultures excluding social milieu. Within this context, the research attempts to discuss the contribution of culture-led approaches in the regeneration of Istanbul waterfront by using a case study of the Golden Horn Cultural Valley Project (GHCVP) as empirical evidence. The GHCVP is not only one of the most important indicators of wider governmental emphasis on culture as a way of reviving Istanbul's waterfront; but also it provides major discussions and claims on the impact of these developments, especially those regarding the historic environment, local community and economy. The results of this research respond to questions about what makes waterfront regeneration a success and what role the culture-led approaches should play in the process of waterfront regeneration.

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Introduction

The regeneration of obsolescent urban waterfronts has proved to be the focus of urban agenda throughout North America and Europe since the 1970s, and more recently all parts of the world including Australia, Hong Kong, Japan and other countries. This was reflected in the increasing research from the early 1980s onwards (Hagerman, 2007; Hoyle & Pinder, 1992; Jauhiainen, 1995; Mann, 1988; Sieber, 1991). A review of international studies illustrates that most of the previous research on waterfront regeneration was concentrated on Western countries, with only a few exceptions from developing countries such as Hoyle (1996), Craig-Smith and Fagence (1995), Erbil and Erbil (2001) and Bezmez (2008).

These studies show that the global spread of urban waterfront regeneration, which is largely confined to advanced countries, has also had an impact upon developing countries as they promote post-industrial waterfronts in a range of cultural contexts. Van der Knaap and Pinder (1992, p. 158) have studied this growing tendency in four stages of urban policy development. The last stage, starting from the mid-1980s, emphasized the role of urban-marketing and place-making in parallel with competition as an out-

come of neoliberal policies; thus, more productive, flexible, innovative and income-generating models are needed for the management of cities. Within this spatial organization form of globalization, waterfronts provide potential urban spaces as one of the most significant instruments that are designed to enhance the competitive power of cities by offering attractive and large-scale leisure, office and residential projects (Fainstein, 2008; Harvey, 1989; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008). Because, as Hall (1998) suggests, urban waterfronts are highly exploitable spaces due to their fundamental property of being the interface between built environment and water.

However, waterfront regeneration occurs at the problematic and controversial interface between port function and the broader urban environment. From the earliest literature on waterfront regeneration, there has been scepticism regarding the replacement of old port functions with post-industrial spaces of consumption. Among these viewpoints are those suggested by Harvey (1989), Bassett, Griffiths, and Smith (2002), Fainstein (2008) and Moore (2008), which dealt with waterfront regeneration's synonymous structure with neoliberal urban politics in creating privatized spaces and commodified cultures excluding the social milieu. In these social and policy contexts, there is no doubt that culture-led approaches have become the new orthodoxy in waterfront regeneration. In terms of the understanding of global processes and an appreciation of the distinctiveness of port-city locations, culture has become increasingly important as a tool for the regeneration of waterfronts in decline by providing the re-functioning of

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abandoned factories and warehouses, the rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods and the utilization of events and amenities that would make waterfronts more attractive to mobile capital (Craig-Smith & Fagence, 1995; Evans, 2005; Hall, 1998).

Within this context, the aim of the research is to discuss the contribution of culture-led approaches in the regeneration of Istanbul waterfront with a case study of the Golden Horn Cultural Valley Project (GHCVP) as empirical evidence. The Golden Horn was selected as a case study area for being a space where culture has been both produced and consumed throughout its history. It has been undergoing a transformation process from an ignored and polluted industrial center to becoming the cultural center of a growing global city. This, on one hand, helped in regenerating Istanbul from a tired city whose glory resided in the past history into a newly-imaged metropolis (Keyder & Oncu, 1994); on the other hand, these “cleaning” projects have swept away historic waterfront neighborhoods (Akin, 1994a). Regeneration measures gained a new pace after the late 1990s and it has once more become the central focus for city governments in the need of creating a world city image for Istanbul and increasing competitive advantage in the new global order. In particular, the GHCVP is a product of this envisioning process. It is the most comprehensive culture-led approach since the inclusion of cultural policies in broader development strategies through the Five-Year Development Plans since the 1960s. It is not only one of the most important indicators of wider governmental emphasis on culture, as a way of reviving Istanbul’s waterfront areas (Greater Istanbul Municipality, 2009, 2010); but is also a laboratory for providing an opportunity for major discussions and claims on the impact of these developments, especially those regarding the historic environment, local community and economy among academia, community groups and media (Bezmez, 2008; Birgun, 2011; FEBAYDER, 2011; UNESCO/WHC, 2009).

Bearing in mind these fundamentals, this research first contributes to the discussion about increasing role of culture-led approaches in waterfront regeneration. Secondly, it gives brief information on the regeneration of the Golden Horn from a natural port to a cultural valley by focusing on the GHCVP. A comparative framework is used to assess the physical and socio-economic implications of the Project through the presentation of academic discourses, media depictions and interviews to counterbalance the lack of quantitative data. The final section is devoted to conclusion and suggestions for further research. The results of this research respond to questions about what makes waterfront regeneration a success and what role culture-led approaches should play in the process of waterfront regeneration.

Culture and waterfront regeneration: A conceptual framework

Although culture is associated endogenously with urban environment and urban life, it was not until the 1980s that the word became increasingly combined with the urban regeneration initiatives through the employment of neoliberal and entrepreneurial urban politics (Harvey, 1989). The transformation from production to service-economy has utilized cultural initiatives as the major component of urban entrepreneurialism, while social and demographic changes have increased the demand for cultural facilities. Owing to these structural changes, culture has begun to assume unprecedented significance as a means for resolving political as well as socio-economic problems of cities in the deindustrialization process and has moved to the very center of the urban policy agenda. As Zukin (1995) states, culture, at last, has become the business of the 20th century city. This role is particularly important when culture is viewed as an important tool for increasing the competitive advantage of cities within a global context. Evans (2005) explores the relationship between culture and regeneration

in three categories. These are “culture-led regeneration”, “cultural regeneration” and “culture and regeneration”. While the first category covers the cultural events and flagship projects as the symbols and catalysts of urban regeneration, the final one reflects disintegrated approaches in urban policy. Following this categorization, cultural regeneration is supposed to be the ideal approach for initiating integrated approaches that utilize culture as a tool of social and economic development. This research particularly uses the concept of culture-led regeneration to highlight the current approach in the regeneration of the Golden Horn waterfront.

Culture has been employed in urban regeneration programmes through the culture-led approach, such as cultural quarters, cultural infrastructure (museums, thematic and heritage parks, etc.), and cultural events (festivals, European Capital of Culture events, etc.). Given the uniqueness of the cities as part of the 21st century orthodoxy, culture-led regeneration puts the local governments one step further in the competition for attracting people (Evans, 2005; Garcia, 2004; Harvey, 1989; Zukin, 1995) by promoting tourism, encouraging business enterprises, securing inward investment and revitalizing the local economy. Culture-led approaches, in this form, are particularly relevant to post-industrial and especially waterfront areas in that they can be used as a tool to boost local vibrancy and create a sense of regional patriotism through the re-functioning of abandoned factories and warehouses, the rehabilitation of historic waterfront neighborhoods and the branding of space (Craig-Smith & Fagence, 1995; Evans, 2005; Fainstein, 2008; Hall, 1998). Some of the examples of this kind are the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum in Abandoibarra (Del Cerro, 2007); the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay (Jauhainen, 1995); Thames Gateway in London (Fainstein, 2008) and the GHCVP in Istanbul (Bezmez, 2008).

However, the culture-led approach is not a panacea. With reference to the literature on waterfronts, it has been claimed that the contemporary trends of waterfront regeneration merely repackage culture in a franchised and commodified way (Harvey, 1989). The culture-led approach has been criticized for similar reasons. Despite the strong emphasis on social impacts to address social inclusion and quality of life during recent years, the key goals have also increasingly been defined in economic terms due to the impacts of neoliberal policies (Evans, 2005; Garcia, 2004; Moore, 2008). As Garcia (2004, p. 314) states “culture today is an economic asset, a commodity with a market value and a valuable producer of marketable city space”. Within the context of innovative and competitive structure of global order, culture-led approaches continue to create spaces where culture is produced, marketed and consumed (Evans, 2005; Garcia, 2004; Harvey, 1989; Urry, 2002; Zukin, 1995). Called a “carnival mask” by Harvey (1989) and “selling places for pleasure” by Urry (2002), culture-led regeneration is claimed to pose the risk of spreading the culture of capitalism and thus the commodification of culture. As suggested by Bassett et al. (2002) and Negussie (2006), the neoliberal national state encourages the creation of the necessary legal framework to facilitate and promote these kinds of approaches in favor of market-led governance that leads a bold presence in rapidly-expanding privatization process, selling of public property and declining influence of the state and laws.

One of the most critical approaches that show how culture is part of these conflicts is Zukin’s (1995) question: Whose culture? Whose city? Urry (2002), Garcia (2004) and Moore (2008) further attributed these conflicts to the unbalanced relationship between economic and cultural priorities in urban policy whereby the local communities are excluded. Therefore, culture-led regeneration should have an explicit commitment to revitalize the cultural, social and political life of local communities by putting emphasis on the benefit it brings to the quality of life, social cohesion, and community development. Considering this conceptual framework, the next section is devoted to the discussion on the contribution of cul-

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