

# The impact of a mega-event on city branding: The European Capital of Culture 2010 and the image of Istanbul

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**Border Crossing: Transnational Working Papers, No. 1303**  
<http://tplondon.com/journal/index.php/bc/article/view/372>

## Abstract

This study examines the ways in which the city image of Istanbul is re-created through the mega-events within the context of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2010. Istanbul “took the stage” as one of the three ECoC cities (Essen for the Ruhr in Germany and Pécs in Hungary), where the urban spaces were projected as the theatre décor while residents and visitors became the spectators of the events. Organisers and agents of the ECoC 2010 seemed to rebrand Istanbul as a “world city” rather than a “European capital”. With a series of transnational connotations, this can be considered as part of an attempt to turn Istanbul to a global city. In this study we examine posters used during the ECoC 2010 to see whether this was evident in the promoted images of Istanbul. The research employs a hermeneutic approach in which representations, signs and language are the means of symbolic meaning, which is analysed through qualitative methods for the visual data (Visual Analysis Methods), namely Semiotics and Discourse Analysis. The analysed research material comes from a sample of posters released during the ECoC 2010 to promote 549 events throughout the year. Using stratified random sampling we have drawn 28 posters (5% of the total) reflecting the thematic groups of events in the ECoC 2010. Particular attention is also paid to the reflexivity of the researchers and researchers’ embeddedness to the object of research. The symbolic production and visual representation are therefore investigated firstly through the authoritative and historically constituted discourses in the making of Istanbul image and secondly through the orders of cultural consumption and mediatisation of culture through spectacular events. Hence enforcing a transnationalisation of the image of the city where the image appears to be almost stateless transcending the national boundaries. Findings and methodology used in this study can be useful in understanding similar cases and further research into the processes of city and place branding and image relationships.

**Keywords:** Istanbul; ECoC; city branding; city image; visual representation; transnational place branding.

## Acknowledgement:

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Conference on Communication and the City: Voices, Spaces, Media, organised by Urban Communication Foundation, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK, 14-15 June 2013. [<http://communicationandthecity.leeds.ac.uk/>].

## SUGGESTED CITATION:

Dogan, Evinc and Sirkeci, Ibrahim (2013) ‘The impact of a mega-event on city branding: The European Capital of Culture 2010 and the image of Istanbul’. *Border Crossing: Transnational Working Papers*, No. 1303. Available at: <http://tplondon.com/journal/index.php/bc/article/view/372>.

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## Introduction

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) team widely used the statement, “Istanbul took the stage” in their campaigns for Istanbul 2010. It refers to the theatre metaphor, where urban space and everything on there became the theatre décor and residents of Istanbul and the visitors became the spectators of the event. City branding practice is not only about *production of the meaning* but also *staging of the meaning*. The meaning is created through the portrayed, projected image of the city which positions the city in the minds of its clients (e.g. visitors, investors, residents, etc.). The mega-events are useful instruments to disseminate the city image. This study focuses on the process of (re-)creating and modifying the city image of Istanbul through the mega-event of the ECoC 2010.

We begin with identifying how does the image of a city is formed in city marketing and branding practices. In this respect, the literature on the spectacle and cultural consumption is discussed. Then we briefly describe the data and methods employed in the study. Finally, drawing upon the analysis of the visual promotional materials collected through the mega-event, we discuss the ways in which the ECoC 2010 influenced the city image, a component of city brand of Istanbul.

## City image as a component of city brand

Place marketing or city marketing is highly associated with city branding and imaging strategies (Roche, 1992; Hall, 1994; Stevenson, 2003). Ashworth & Voogd (1988: 68) define city marketing as “planning actions designed to initiate or stimulate processes that improve the relative market position of cities”. Thus, city marketing is the “conscious and planned practice of signification and representation” in order to shape the perceptions to create desired actions (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993: 246). Brand identity can be defined as “a unique set of associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain” (Aaker, 1996: 68). Therefore, brand identity addresses objectives of the producer whereas brand image is more about the receiver’s side, and the “meaning that the consumers associate with the product, based on experiences, impressions and perceptions of the functional, emotional, and symbolic benefits of the brand” (Kaplan et al., 2008: 1291). De Chernatony (1999: 165) argues that brand identity “is about ethos, aims and values that present a sense of individuality differentiating the brand”. The need for differentiation forces destinations to re-invent their images and to re-position themselves (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011: 69). City marketers create “impressive images and seductive signs” (Kalergis, 2008: 32) to make cities more attractive (Selby, 2004: 48). Positive images tend to be *clear* and *favourable* images. Clear images provide signs that make the “structural legibility of the city” more coherent (Lynch, 1960). Favourable images stem from the relationship of the individual with its environment or the feeling that the image communicates. People do buy looking at an image.

The study of Baloglu and McCleary (1999) differentiates the *perceived image* by the visitors and the *desired image* by the destination from each other. The brand is formulated through examining the brand image and personality of a destination and by matching it to “a desired and fit-to-resources image” (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011: 69-70). The *desired image* should be communicated truly, while it has to be reliable at the same time. In other words the communication should be consistent to reflect on the city’s real features and qualities. Thus, branding should target not only creating an attractive and positive image of a place that is appealing to people, but also achieving consistency between the image and experience to build a long-term value and to achieve repetitive visits to the destination. Kapferer (1997: 25) explains the value added by brand through the “ability to gain an exclusive, positive and prominent meaning in the minds of a large number of consumers”. Branding strategy is closely correlated with brand awareness and brand loyalty as consistent marketing strategy has a potential effect on changing consumer knowledge regarding the brand (Keller, 2003). Brand is more than an identifier; it signifies the place of the product in the mind of the consumer (Kapferer, 1997: 23). *Mental structures* play a central role in the perception of the images of the city as well as the city itself. According to Espelt & Benito (2005: 777), “knowledge, impressions

and values based on a series of perceptions” are influential in the formation of mental structures. Sometimes they are constructed by the physical experience in the city, sometimes through images and narratives.

Moreover, cultural background makes a difference in the reception of messages and interpretation of the images (Short, 2012: 42). City image is subjective; therefore it changes from one person to another. It also differs for the people who are born into the culture of a city compared to an outsider view of that city as the collective symbols and memories affect the perception (Schweitzer et al., 1999). In an ordinary daily conversation, when we are asked about our origin of place (“Where are you from?”), it is followed by another question: “Have you ever been there?” Visiting and experiencing a place is crucial for personal perceptions. Whatever is the case, whether a personal experience or not, we have a certain image in our minds. The new image is not totally brand new but it is built as a new layer on top of the existing image:

“Older people still experience the need to translate images into observed reality. When they travel they want to see the Eiffel Tower or the Grand Canyon exactly as they saw them first on posters. An American tourist . . . does more than see the Eiffel Tower. He photographs it exactly as he knows it from posters. Better still, he has someone photograph him in front of it. Back home, that photograph reaffirms his identity with that scene” (Carpenter, 1972: 6).

According to Lash and Urry (1994: 272) “what is consumed in tourism are visual signs and sometimes a simulacrum”. Baudrillard (1981: 205) argues that the sign-form, the image, stems from economic-exchange, which is precipitated by modern forms of mass communication and the commodification of culture. The *exchange value* and *use value* are described in terms of commodity. Exchange value stands for the “abstract universal or singularity” a quantity; although use value represents a “concrete singularity”, a quality. A third value is added to the commodity by Baudrillard (1994: 6), which is the *sign value*. Sign value of the consumption has become central to the postmodern manoeuvre in marketing and consumer research rather than the exchange value concept in the traditional theory. Applbaum (2004: 47) uses the term *sign-value fetishism* to describe the essentiality of sign value and links the term to Marx’s *commodity fetishism*. He recognizes branding as “one of the most significant symbolization strategies” (Applbaum, 2004: 52). Accordingly, tourism involves a collection of signs created by the spectacles (Urry, 1995: 21) in the process of “creation of aestheticized spaces of entertainment” (Zukin, 1995: 3-11).

Heavily influenced by the Situationists, Baudrillard (1996: 198) highlights the importance of spectacle for the consumption of images through advertisements as “we consume the product through the product itself, but we consume its meaning through advertising”. The spectacle has entered our daily lives following the merger of the culture with the market, in which the consumer culture celebrated the commodity and its spectacle. The world historical events are increasingly condemned to disappear (Baudrillard, 1994), as Debord (1994 [1967]: 20) expresses “When the spectacle stops talking about something for three days, it is as if it did not exist”. Urban spectacles are started to be mass-produced for the sake of profit making and bureaucratic control motives, which force individuals to consume images as passive spectators (Gotham, 2005: 227). In opposition to the former theories of Debord and Marxist theorists, MacCannell (2001: 24) argues that people are not just passive consumers; “tourists remain free to look the other way, or to not look at all”. Nevertheless, we live in a society surrounded by images (Debord, 1994 [1967]). As Debord (1994 [1967]: para.4) notes “spectacle is a social relation among people, mediated by images”. The signs are inescapable as they are all over the place.

Place marketing is not so different from product marketing (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005: 513) when it is approached in terms of goods, which are not merely products but they are images sold and bought on the market (Applbaum, 2004: 47). Place marketing has been somehow used interchangeably with *selling places* (Burgess 1982; Kearns & Philo 1993) due to the idea of places being consumed and being sold on the market as products. Although *selling place* is used to describe the fierce promotional activities in the competitive environment, Anholt (2010: 11) claims “countries and cities are not for sale”. Therefore he offers a distinction between *brand images of places*

and *branding places*, where branding signifies an ambitious and an unproven claim. Branding does not create images, it creates messages. These messages are directed towards shaping the image and manipulating the perceptions for the image: instead of saying “please try this product” they say “please change your mind about this country” (Anholt, 2010: 3). Moreover Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2005: 510) add; “places are not products, governments are not producers and users are not consumers.” What makes city marketing different and more complicated than product marketing, is the cultural context and the interpretation of the meaning. The key to branding cities is recognizing the “city’s complexity and heterogeneity” (Kalandides, 2007: 5, 9).

### **Istanbul 2010: “The stage is yours Istanbul”**

The idea of ECoC dates back to the 1980s in the form of cultural days and cultural months. In 1985, Athens became the first European City of Culture through the initiation of the cultural programme by Melina Mercouri, the Greek Minister of Culture. Every year one (or more) city in Europe is designated as the European City of Culture where Florence followed Athens and “a whole canon of cities have emerged that are networked into the map of cultural capitals” (Palonen, 2010: 91). The initial program has developed further and the name is changed from European City of Culture into European Capital of Culture in 1999 (The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union, 1999). European Capitals of Culture over the years (from 1985 to 2013) are listed below:

**Table 1.** European Capitals of Culture, 1985-2013

|                 |   |   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| 1985: Athens    | 1995: Luxembourg  | 2005: Cork                                  |
| 1986: Florence  | 1996: Copenhagen  | 2006: Patras                                |
| 1987: Amsterdam | 1997: Thessaloniki  | 2007: Luxembourg and Sibiu                  |
| 1988: Berlin    | 1998: Stockholm   | 2008: Liverpool and Stavanger               |
| 1989: Paris     | 1999: Weimar  | 2009: Linz and Vilnius                      |
| 1990: Glasgow   | 2000: Avignon, Bergen, Bologna, Brussels, Helsinki, Krakow, Reykjavik, Prague, Santiago de Compostela | 2010: Essen for the Ruhr, Pécs and Istanbul |
| 1991: Dublin    | 2001: Porto and Rotterdam   | 2011: Turku and Tallinn                     |
| 1992: Madrid    | 2002: Bruges and Salamanca □  | 2012: Guimarães and Maribor                 |
| 1993: Antwerp   | 2003: Graz  | 2013: Marseilles and Košice                 |
| 1994: Lisbon    | 2004: Genoa and Lille   |   |

*Source: European Commission (2013). Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/current-capitals\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/current-capitals_en.htm)*

The Decision on the designation of European Capitals of Culture – 1419/1999/EC adopted by European Parliament and the Council of Ministers had opened the door to non-member states for bidding (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2010, 2006: 2). The application dossier for ECoC 2010 was presented to the Council of Europe General Directorate for Education and Culture in Brussels on 13th December 2005. In the dossier, the brand identity and image of Istanbul were founded on the concept of “Istanbul: The City of Four Elements”. The idea of four elements is rooted in the ancient philosophy corresponding to the basic elements of the universe: earth, air, water and fire (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2010, 2006: 5). The idea of a programme articulated around the four elements was highly appreciated by The Selection Committee as “it was viewed both as innovative and as building on the roots of the city at the same time” (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2010, 2006: 11).

Bourdieu (1984: 232) suggests that consumption of culture is not only dependent on economic means but also knowledge and willingness to participate to an exchange of cultural end symbolic capital in a cultural/symbolic economy. ECoC is a mega-event that has political and cultural dimensions impacting on this process by imposing criterias such as “European dimension” and “city and citizens”. The participation of the citizens has attracted ultimate attention in the organization of ECoC; “as regards ‘City and Citizens’ the programme shall: foster the participation of the citizens living in the city and its surroundings and raise their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad” (Rampton et al., 2011: 5). The main motives for Istanbul to be successful in its bidding for ECoC 2010 are reported as “bottom-up dimension (including the prominent role for civil society), involvement of citizens, sustainability and communication strategy” (Rampton et al., 2011: 67). On the other hand, according to the Final Report published by European Commission (Rampton et al., 2011: 79), the communication campaign of Istanbul 2010 “did not make a particular statement about European dimension”. European Commission manifests itself as the “EU's executive body” and “represents the interests of Europe as a whole”<sup>1</sup>. The objective of ECoC is promoting the “Europeanness” through culture. The slogan of international promotion campaign of Istanbul 2010 underlines the vision of a World city as we read “Istanbul... The most inspiring city of the world”. In this highly pretentious statement, there is no reference to Europe, not even to Capital of Culture. This indicates a broader scope of branding vision crossing across the European vision. Bagis (Minister of EU affairs, Chief Negotiator and Istanbul Deputy) claimed that ECoC meant to make Istanbul a “World city” more than a “European capital” (Bagis, 2010: 29).

The marketing campaign for Istanbul 2010 announces that “stage belongs to Istanbul” while inviting the audience to “re-discover”<sup>2</sup> the culture and heritage (Soysal, 2010: 307). According to Soysal (2010: 302) the most important product of such practices is “creating a brand name for the city”. The marketing and branding objectives center around the city image improvement, the multicultural aspects and values come forward “to attract the attention of the world’s public opinion” (Bilsel & Arican, 2010: 217). Despite the broad use of communication channels and success in creating awareness, it cannot be said the same for communicating the message. People know “there is something called Istanbul 2010 but not sure what it is exactly” (Sevin, 2010). This mainly stems from the lack of focus in branding and communication. The images of Istanbul pile up in videos and posters to show the city in every aspect in which everything becomes mishmash and the message gets lost in the chaos. The image of Istanbul represents continuity through its dialectics and connections between the mythic past and modernizing city. Reading the cultural codes is not easy when the cultural accumulation and context of Istanbul is taken into account. Familiarization with the codes, signs and discourses lays the ground for stepping into the next level in research: selecting the appropriate tools and analysing the data.

### **Research design and methodology**

The research poses the question of the effect of Istanbul 2010 event on the city image as a component of city brand of Istanbul. The answer sought for this question is not yes/no but to find out “HOW” did Istanbul 2010 impact on Istanbul image.

This research is based on an analysis of the city image making process, as one of the objectives of the cultural programme of the Istanbul 2010 mega-event. As the research approaches to the concept of city image from the marketing and advertising perspective as a component of city brand, the language of signs is the main instrument to be utilized in understanding material and social reality making the discourses and the image of Istanbul. In this framework, the methods employed in this study can be classified as visual qualitative methods. This captures a mix of two qualitative methods; namely semiotics and discourse analysis.

#### *Data & Sampling:*

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<sup>1</sup> “About the European Commission”. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/about/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/about/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Extracted from the slogans used for the official promotional campaigns by Istanbul 2010 Agency.

Posters are the unit of analysis in this study. Posters talk to the audience, they are in the city – on the walls, airports, at the metro stations, at the bus stops, on the façades of the buildings; on-site and off-site, but never out of sight. Posters generate discourses aimed at communicating the brand (Oswald, 2012: 35). The symbolic language of the posters includes extensive signs directed towards representing Istanbul and its image.

The overall data for analysis are classified into two main categories as the official promotion materials for the first group and Istanbul 2010 projects for the second group. The projects are divided into three subgroups defined as “strategic areas” by Istanbul 2010 Agency. The classification of the data is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Categories for materials (i.e. posters) and analysis

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>1. Istanbul 2010 Agency official promotion campaign</b> |   |  |
| a) International promotion campaign                        | b) Domestic promotion campaign            |  |
| <b>2. Istanbul 2010 projects of the year 2010</b>          |   |  |
| a) Tourism & Promotion<br>promotion & communi-<br>cation   | b) Urban transformation<br>urban projects | c) Culture & art<br>visual arts              |
| international relations                                    | cultural heritage & museums               | music & opera/<br>classical Turkish music    |
|  | urban culture                             | film & documentary & animation<br>literature |
|  |   | theatre & performing arts                    |
|  |   | traditional arts                             |
|  |   | education                                    |
|  |   | maritime and sports                          |
|  |   | parallel events                              |

The first group, which is the official promotion data by Istanbul 2010 Agency, is the main data group to understand the strategic image making process. The visual icon (Istanbul silhouette) is created to present the image of Istanbul to the world for the international campaign. The poster is placed in the main squares, train stations and airports of a number of European cities such as San Marco Square in Venice or Gare du Nord in Paris (“Dünyanın en ilham verici' kentini 'yeniden keşfetme' zamanı”, 2009). The domestic campaign, on the other hand, used different posters, in which the emphasis was on the cultural heritage and landmarks of Istanbul, such as Hagia Sophia, Galata Tower and Haydarpaşa Train Station, inviting viewers and citizens to re-discover the city and its culture with the slogan “Now is the time to re-discover!”

The second group of data focusing on the posters of the Istanbul 2010 projects is also significant in terms of the role of cultural events in the making of city image. *Stratified random sampling* is employed through the main strategic areas and project categories defined by Istanbul 2010 Agency. “RANDBETWEEN” function is used in Microsoft Excel for random sampling. The projects are identified with numbers random selection. Random selection is done by taking the range of projects for instance “RANDBETWEEN (1;39)” if the total number of projects are 39 in the defined strata; i.e. Total number of “urban projects” is equal to 48 therefore the range for randomization is chosen “RANDBETWEEN (1; 48)”. Since 3 projects (a proportional number of projects are chosen from each strata) are selected from this category; random selection is repeated for 3 times and 29th, 11th and 47th projects are picked up on the list.

#### *Steps of Analysis: Form and Content*

The methodological tools are used through a two-step analysis of the data; the first step is descriptive and the second is interpretive. In the first step of the analysis, the reading of the posters in the official promotional campaign of Istanbul 2010 is carried out through the description of “sites” where the meanings are made (Rose, 2001: 113). Production and audience are described in the first step by defining who produced the image and for whom. The second step concentrates on the image

itself as the third site and strives for interpreting the signs coded in the images. In a conversation on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012, Rose (2012) proposed the addition of the fourth site to the first step to enhance the meaning by defining the places where the posters are exposed to viewers. She calls this site “positioning” referring to the site of advertisement, if it is put on a billboard or published on internet or TV or a magazine so on and so forth. In this research, we are looking at the posters of Istanbul 2010 that are placed on billboards.

The first part of analysis provides familiarization with the codes lying on the denotative level in the posters. Production technologies, target audience and places of exposure are identified for better understanding of the data for further interpretation of the content. In doing so, the focus of the abstract system of codes structuring the meaning production is moved to the image itself. Therefore, the image itself becomes the object of analysis at the second part providing the content. Interpretation ideally emerges from descriptive details. The information gathered through description goes further than merely describing the physical patterns related to the design of the posters) The form and content, defined as the conditions in developing visual literacy, are slightly different than its definition art history in this sense. It is very important to note one thing here: the images are not only meaningful through their technical and compositional features. The signs gain different meanings in the social and cultural context in which they appear. For instance red might mean passion in one culture whether it might mean holiness in another. Red colour symbolizes a cultural value for bull fights in Spain and it symbolizes the colour of flag for Turkish people thus signalling nationalistic values. Therefore the focus of the analysis is neither the intended meanings by the producer, nor the perceived meanings by the audience. It is what the image and text signify and communicate.

*Coding the data:*

Coding is a crucial step in qualitative analysis followed by developing themes within the raw data, which may include taking frequencies, identifying co-occurrence and displaying relationships within and between the groups of codes. The codes are listed on an Excel sheet in order to search for a pattern between them by counting on the frequency of each code. This is done by “COUNTIF” function in Excel and not by “FREQUENCY”, because the data is not coded as numbers but words (such as culture, history, heritage, city, mosque, bridge, etc.).

**Table 3:** Frequency of codes

| <b>Keywords</b> | <b>Frequency (f)</b> |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Istanbul        | 25                   |
| Culture         | 18                   |
| History         | 16                   |
| Monument        | 15                   |
| City            | 15                   |
| Modern          | 8                    |
| Heritage        | 7                    |
| Spectacle       | 7                    |
| Nostalgia       | 5                    |
| Bridge          | 4                    |

According to Table 3, Istanbul occurs the most frequently in the posters, whether it could be coded as a word in the verbal text or represented through iconic symbols, synecdoche images and/or panoramic views. The total number of posters is 32. Thus, 25 stands for a high frequency value, which means that a large share of the posters speak about Istanbul. The second most frequent code appearing in the posters is the culture, which is slightly more than half of the posters. Since the ECoC event has a focus on culture, cities showcase their cultural assets and they brand themselves through cultural events. Nevertheless, the codes with the highest frequency rates should not be understood as a sign of prevalence. It is important to pay attention how codes combine to form over-reaching themes in the data with an aim of focusing on broader patterns and integrating coded data with proposed themes.

### Thematic Categories

Dey (2005: 45-47) approaches to categorization as a “method of funnelling the data” through “breaking up data & bringing it together again” and “laying down the conceptual foundations for analysis”. Classifying the codes into the thematic groups provides “practical reasoning” and allows the researcher(s) to have a more rigorous conceptualization, which should be “guided by research objectives” (Dey, 2005: 47). In this research, the analysis results are summarized according to the themes, which are found to be following meaningful patterns. The themes appear into 3 categories by drawing parallelism with the triad of spectacle-city-image, which has been used in the structure of conceptual and contextual framework of this research. The spectacle is linked to cultural consumption where the city-scapes become the theatre decor. The urban transformation can be read through the historical monuments symbolizing the city. This is the second category, which is exemplified through the slogan of rediscover. If paid attention, it can be seen that slogans are also captured in the definition of themes. The city image is explained through the contrasts portraying Istanbul as a city in-between (East-West, old-contemporary, etc.). The sub-themes and deeper meanings are also discussed under these categories:

1. The spectacularization of culture: “The stage is yours Istanbul”
2. Transformation of the city from past to present: “Now is the time to Rediscover!”
3. The dialectics of city imaging: Istanbul in between...

These categories also comply with the strata, which were defined before for the classification of the second data set of the posters. As presented earlier, Istanbul 2010 put the emphasis on three areas: “tourism and promotion”, “urban transformation” and lastly “culture and arts” (Istanbul 2010 ECoC Agency, 2011: 13). If we evaluate the images on a thematic basis with respect to these sub-groups (strata), each stratum can be assigned to one of the thematic categories inferred from the analysis. Accordingly art and culture apply to the theme of spectacle, urban transformation applies to the theme of rediscovering the discourses on the city from past to present, and lastly tourism and promotion apply to the theme of marketing the city image through a dialectic discussion of unity and fragmentation. The table below indicates which stratum is linked to which thematic category in accordance with the theoretical concepts.

**Table 4:** Thematic categories and subthemes

| Theoretical concepts | Brand & Image   | The Spectacle   | The City  |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Strata</b>        | Tourism & promotion   | Culture and Arts  | Urban Transformation  |
| <b>Themes</b>        | The dialectics of city imaging: Istanbul in between...  | The spectacularization of culture: “The stage is yours Istanbul”  | Transformation of the city from past to present: “Now is the time to Rediscover!”   |
| <b>Subthemes</b>     | <u>Patterns:</u><br>bridge, silhouette, domes & minarets, self-orientalism, dynamism, continuity, change, diversity, cosmopolitan, tolerant | <u>Patterns:</u><br>commodity fetish, theatricality, authenticity, standardization, nostalgia, culture, heritage                  | <u>Patterns:</u><br>Representation of space/ space of representation, globalization, iconic architecture, monument, collective memory |
|                      | <u>Contrasts:</u><br>Orient/Occident<br>new/old<br>past/contemporary<br>continuous/discontinuous<br>destruction/reconstruction              | <u>Utterances:</u><br>“A city of four elements”<br>Capital of civilizations<br>Meeting point of East & West<br>Mosaic of cultures | <u>Utterances:</u><br>Inspiring city<br>“Diver-city”<br>Palimpsest city   |
|                      | <u>Symbols:</u><br>synecdoche<br>(silhouette, Galata, water/waterfront)   | <u>Denomination:</u><br>projected city<br>cool city<br>creative city  | <u>Denomination:</u><br>Capital city<br>European city<br>World city   |



|  |  |                         |  |
|--|--|-------------------------|--|
|  | totalizing<br>(panorama, bird-eye)<br>metaphor | contemporary metropolis |  |
|--|--|-------------------------|--|

The important point in answering the research question is to identify how the themes fit together and convey a story about data set. The research takes data-driven *inductive approach* of Boyatzis (1998) by drawing upon the recurring themes in the posters. The themes are incorporated through *deductive approach* into its structure with the information available from conceptual and contextual framework.

### **Istanbul: “Union of opposites”<sup>3</sup>**

*The spectacularization of culture: “The stage is yours Istanbul”*

This category is about the spectacle, in other words it concentrates on the meanings created by ECoC as an example of mega-event. The spectacularization of the culture connotes the critical theory on consumer culture, in which the culture becomes the commodified object. The contemporary culture industry and creative sector were thought to be underdeveloped compared to the possession of rich cultural heritage. Therefore the images concentrating on the heritage sites, such as Hagia Sophia, Galata and Haydarpassa, are coupled with the images of “cool city” vibrating with arts and culture. However, this image is exposed to the international arena to put Istanbul on the showcase. Istanbul is not cool for its locals, who suffer from the everyday life, traffic, economic crisis, unemployment, high rents and etc.

The image of cool Istanbul is an example of the materialization of the discourses directed towards the cultural production, which turns commodity fetish into romanticized images and/or phantasmagorias. The lived space transforms itself into imagined space as the urban cultural assets and the cityscapes are transforming into a theatre decor marketed to spectators. Heritage is represented as a commodifiable object. It has become a mean of “public consumption as nostalgia” (Soysal, 2010: 302) through the restoration and renovation projects supported by Istanbul 2010 programme. The urban transformation of run-down areas and heritage sites into archaeological parks and conversion of old buildings into cultural venues and museums are such examples. This has become the point of issue that has started with decisions taken by local authorities imposed into urban and cultural politics and continued with Istanbul 2010 rather than being a process that started with Istanbul 2010. This shows itself through the top-down mechanisms in the making of Istanbul a “projected city” by governors.

Culture and heritage appear as a common theme in the posters. The messages communicated by the posters are parallel to the discourse streamlines such as “meeting of civilizations” and/or “cultural bridge-cultural dialogue”. If we extend the meaning of heritage, we can find similar patterns throughout the representations of Istanbul. One of the themes is “mosaic of cultures”. However it should be noted that the state of multiculturalism representing today’s Istanbul is eclectic. Today, Istanbul’s population also includes Kurdish migrants and refugees from the Middle East, who are not represented due to the marketing strategies keeping them out of sight, both in everyday life and in the representations of the city. This increases the contradiction between the lived space and imagined space.

*Transformation of the city from past to present: “Now is the time to rediscover!”*

The posters are inviting the viewers to rethink the past and “rediscover” the meaning of heritage by heavily relying on the representations of heritage sites. The intention is to offer a new perspective to the centuries old monumental structures (by showing them in different places rather than their original places in Istanbul) and to surprise the viewers, which is a common trick in marketing. Nevertheless, this creates a touristic impact in which the audience is invited to visit these sites as tourists. Yet, it remains questionable if they are really encouraged to rethink the past of these structures.

<sup>3</sup> Although the term is coined by Carl Jung, the root of the theory goes back to Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher. Here it refers to binary oppositions conceptualized by Levi-Strauss (1969).

Moreover, the theme “Now is the time to rediscover” and how it is represented through images of Galata Tower, Haydarpaşa and Hagia Sophia remain controversial to the meaning of heritage. Atatürk Culture Center (AKM) in Taksim Square (replaced by the image of Haydarpaşa in one of the posters) is face to face with demolition, while these posters signify the importance of heritage. Haydarpaşa shares the destiny of AKM through a mega urban regeneration project.

The urban transformation, as a materialistic production of the space of representation in contrary to the represented urban space, is depicted in the posters of the urban projects such as “Ghost Buildings”, “Istanbul 1910-2010”, as well as “Palimpsest Istanbul”. The history and modern coexist together in Istanbul while the history is resisting against the modern. The image of Istanbul is changing by the emerging orders of finance and capital with the mushrooming new shopping malls, multinational firms with their headquarters in high-rise buildings, five star hotels and the gated communities replacing the old-historical neighbourhoods. The modern contradicts the old, but Istanbul is remembering its past as a glorious capital hosting three empires.

Moreover, adding everything into one unique image ends up in losing the uniqueness and makes the place somewhere you can find everything. But this feels not special, not original and even ordinary as the cities started to resemble each other more and more. Therefore instead of focusing on the unique elements and stressing the competitive advantage it creates generic images that are hard to remember and distinguish from each other. Another point, which can be raised parallel to the images of global cities, is the prevalence of skyline images representing cities. Under the effect of globalization, Istanbul becomes a battlefield of the clash between the differences and homogenizing urban development processes through “over-imposed visions”. There is a constant and rapid urban transformation. However this transformation takes place according to the ideological frameworks of the ruling government, nevertheless with a lack of planning. The urbanization has been criticized for massive destructions and erasing the traces of the past and memory of the city. The landscape of Istanbul in the globalization process is changing parallel to the standardization of its image of any global city that can be found elsewhere in the world. The city is changing at a great pace and the urban spaces become alike. While the urban collective memory of the city is being erased, the references of the city image are disappearing both physically and in the minds of the people. The exhibition of Ghost Buildings and its poster tells this story through the animated images of the historical buildings, which are not existing anymore, and asking the questions “what if?..”. Today, how many people asks “What is this building used to be?” when passing by and in most of the cases, most of the people find it difficult to remember what was there before. Those who are not native to Istanbul do not know about its past although they have a blurred image of it.

### *The dialectics of city imaging: Istanbul in between...*

Dondis (1973) posits understanding of meaning through contrasting pairs; “if there would be an understanding of hot without cold, high without low, sweet without sour”. The importance of contrasting pairs has been recognized not only as a way of “clarifying the content of visual communication” but also in “creating a coherent whole” (Aydinli, 2011: 23). In addition contrast adds dynamism to the composition of an image or work of art in general sense through “tensions and resolutions, balance and unbalance, rhythmic coherence making it not a precarious yet continuous unity” (Langer, 1957). In this description the meaning of contrast is understood not only in terms of dichotomies and/or dualisms but rather in the sense of contrasting elements complementing each other in the unified whole. Therefore dialectics should not be understood only in the sense of dualisms presenting binary oppositions in the image of the city. Aydinli (2011: 22) takes the contrasting pairs such as “continuity and change” by means of “both opposing but complementary concepts”, and notes that “Istanbul presents a reflective image of change and continuity”. Istanbul is a continuous city when it is read through its history; however the continuity is cut through destructions and re-constructions therefore the continuous urban change brings discontinuity to the images to be read on the same axis of meanings. It needs constant re-interpretation of the signs at the contextual level.

When one thinks of the historical ties of Istanbul and the layers of city image built on thousands of years, it would be unfavourable to expect that the city image could be solely affected by a contemporary mega-event. For this reason, it could be claimed that the main discourse of Istanbul 2010 and the major strategies for city imaging is adding the “new” without cutting its roots with the “old”. Nevertheless, one of the main critical aspects about image-making strategy of Istanbul stems from the cliché statements of old-new and East-West as the examples of binary oppositions. Istanbul has been perceived as a meeting point between East and West. If we put it another way, this perception is intensified, overemphasized and imposed to consumers – buyers of the city image. The history of a city is a strong brand asset. On the other hand, when the new replaces the old, the old loses its value. The skyscrapers, added to the silhouette of Istanbul with minarets, increased the tension between the binary oppositions such as East-West, old-new, Islamic-Secular. This “dialectical image” is converted into a marketing tool by annexing other adjectives such as “diversity”, “cosmopolitan”, “tolerant”, etc. As a result, what the audience gets is a chaotic image piling up on the posters. Brand identity is the backbone of a strong brand value; therefore Istanbul should get over this identity crisis and have a clear vision for a consistent branding strategy.

### **Conclusion**

Branding Istanbul through ECoC is a unique opportunity for international visibility. The benefits of the brand do not, however, flow automatically. This means; “the opportunity is there and it is up to the city to make the best use of it” (European Commission, 2010). The key to the success for city imaging lies in stressing the unique features of the city, although globalization works in the opposite way through standardization. A city, which has a lot to offer something for everyone, is different from a city where everyone can find similar things to other cities. Istanbul has a lot to offer to visitors. Istanbul is between the Orient and the Occident. On the other hand, Istanbul cannot get rid of the Orientalist gaze of the Westerners to the city, or maybe it does not want to get rid of, but it desires to get advantage of the exotic image.

The city imaging through Istanbul 2010 event is built on the economic policies concentrating on the heritage as a commodifiable object and on the financial networks in order to integrate with world economies through shared urban images and also imaginaries. The transnational<sup>4</sup> dimension of ECoC goes beyond the European network and integrates Istanbul to the international networks through this mega-event. Istanbul is underlined as a cosmopolitan world city, not only a European city. ECoC programme of EU proposes the image of a European city vibrating with arts and culture that has a clean and orderly look, which is also a highly touristic image. The new image created for Istanbul defined a new life-style for its residents by taking culture and arts at its forefront to start

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<sup>4</sup> See Sirkeci (2013) for transnational marketing discussion.

culture-led regeneration. The weakness from the aspect of branding lies in the use of signs as empty signifiers disconnected from the brand identity of Istanbul (if there is a brand identity) therefore representing only touristic images of Istanbul to the audience. The images concentrating on the heritage sites are coupled with the images of “cool city” vibrating with arts and culture. The main motivation was not only creating the image of the cool city but also “generating the transformative energy to build the capacity”. Apparently, the communication campaign needed to be “able to brand such a complex programme” (Rampton et al., 2011: 67). In order to achieve this, the cultural and artistic vision developed at the initial phase should have been retained throughout the entire cultural programme, “notably in marketing and communication” (Rampton et al., 2011: 83).

According to the codes lying under the texts; Istanbul is beautiful but aestheticized and sanitized, it is oriental but modernizing, it is a world city but globalizing. Thus Istanbul’s image is raised among a number of contradictory but also complementary layers of history and meaning. Some of the layers are contradictory as the new layer was founded on top of the existing one, yet in an attempt to erase the old in order to reinforce its presence such as Turkish vs. Ottoman, European vs. Oriental, West vs. East. The most liked Oriental representations of Istanbul seem to contradict with the contemporary images, as the Orient is associated with mysticism and chaotic structure of the city that raises curiosity. Today, what describe Istanbul have become conflicts, controversies and chaotic structure built on multiple layers of meaning.

When we conclude from the visually critical perspective, one should respect the fact that Istanbul could not be represented with a single image, but only through a collection of images. This collection should be consistent at least in its cognate and opposite meanings. This necessitates good curatorial or orchestrating skills in bringing this collage into life. Otherwise the result could not be more than a chaotic image appealing to a perplexed audience. Identifying an image through binary oppositions is a powerful way of generating meaning; as “the meaning of dark is relative to the meaning of light; form is inconceivable except in relation to content” (Chandler, 2007: 91). Nevertheless, the image of Istanbul moves between the opposite ends, but could not reach an agreement. The international campaign of Istanbul 2010 shows the mystified image of the Ottoman palace (Topkapı) and minarets recalling the Western gaze of the past representations. It does not offer something new but asks the Westerners to “remember” of this beautiful turistified image. The domestic campaign asks not only “remember” but also to “rediscover”. This could be only the initial phase of a branding strategy. The crucial element in the image building strategy would be what is added on the layer of heritage to connect with the contemporary. The answer goes beyond the framework of Istanbul 2010. It is recommended further research to investigate and link Istanbul 2010 with the future image building strategies and the role of other mega-events that will be hosted by Istanbul in order to see consistency and controversy in this process.

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**Figure 1:** International Campaign: “Istanbul Inspirations”



Istanbul... the most inspiring city in the world.

Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture will further inspire you with its contemporary art and urban culture. Be a part of this unique experience.



istanbul  
inspirations

“Istanbul Inspirations“

(İstanbul İl Turizm Müdürlüğü Digital Archive of Özgül Özkan Yavuz)

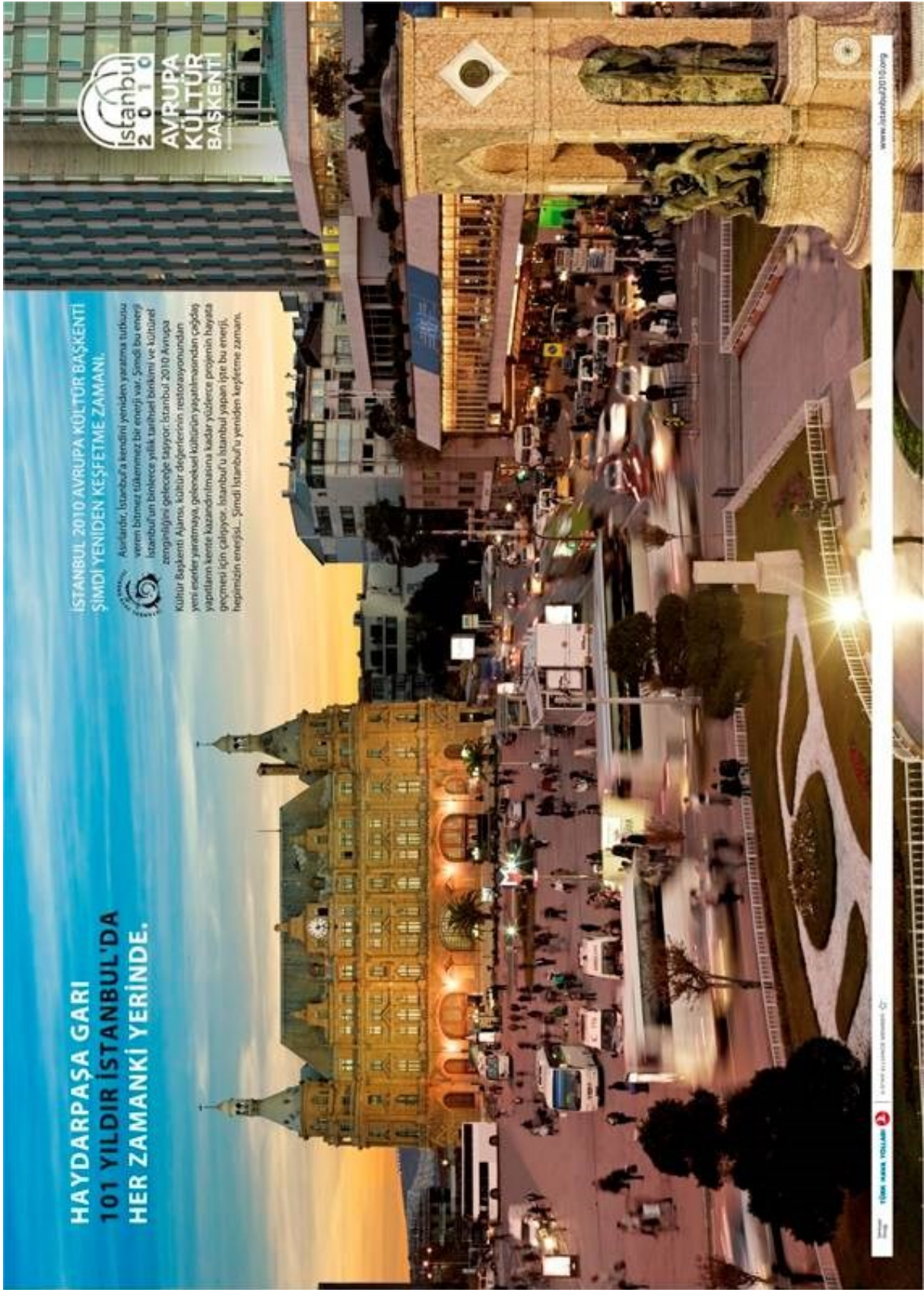
**Figure 2:** Domestic Campaign: “It Is Time To Rediscover” – Galata Tower





“Galata Kulesi 661 Yildir İstanbul’da Her Zamanki Yerinde.”  
(İstanbul İl Turizm Müdürlüğü Digital Archive of Özgül Özkan Yavuz)

**Figure 3:** Domestic Campaign: “It Is Time To Rediscover” – Haydarpaşa



“Haydarpaşa Garı 101 Yıldır İstanbul’da Her Zamanki Yerinde”  
(İstanbul İl Turizm Müdürlüğü Digital Archive of Özgül Özkan Yavuz)

**Figure 4:** Domestic Campaign: “It Is Time To Rediscover” – Hagia Sophia



“Ayasofya 1472 Yıldır İstanbul’da Her Zamanki Yerinde.”  
(İstanbul İl Turizm Müdürlüğü Digital Archive of Özgül Özkan Yavuz)

**Figure 5:** Urban projects: Ghost Buildings

Hayal et  
Yapılar

Ghost  
Buildings

[www.hayal-et.org](http://www.hayal-et.org)



Istanbul 2010 Enerjiyle  
gerçekleştirilen bu  
proje, İstanbul 2010  
Avrupa Kültür Başkenti  
Ajansı tarafından  
desteklenmektedir.



**PATTU** Mimarlık, Araştırma, Tasarım  
Architecture, Research, Design

## Bu yapılar bir zamanlar İstanbul'daydı, ya yıkılmasalardı?

*These buildings once stood in İstanbul,  
what if they still existed?*

Sergi /Exhibition

29.11.2010-23.12-2010

Taksim Maksemi Cumhuriyet Sanat Galerisi



Ghost Buildings  
Designer: Pattu Architecture  
([www.hayal-et.org](http://www.hayal-et.org))

**Figure 6:** Urban projects: Palimpsest İstanbul

# Palimpsest İstanbul

LALEPER AYTEK



12-24 Mayıs Mai 2010

İstanbul Fransız Kültür Merkezi  
Institut Français d'Istanbul  
İstiklal Caddesi no. 4 Taksim  
T + 90 212 393 8111  
www.infist.org

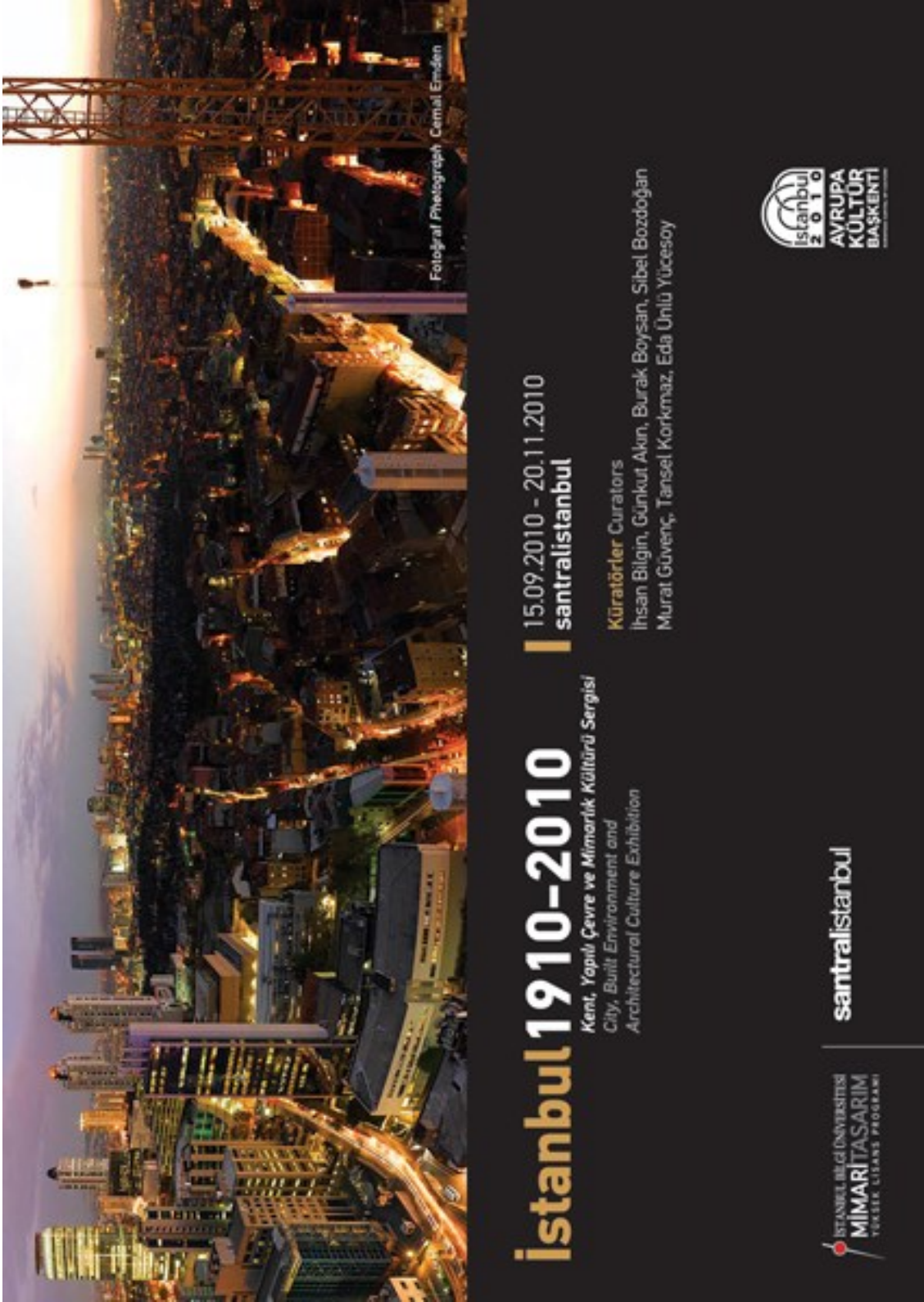
Institut  Français  
d'Istanbul



## Palimpsest İstanbul

(İstanbul 2010 Avrupa Kültür Başkenti Ajansı projeleri afiş seçkisi, İstanbul : İstanbul 2010 Avrupa Kültür Başkenti Ajansı. 2011)

**Figure 7:** Cultural heritage & museums: İstanbul 1910-2010



Istanbul 1910-2010 - City, Built Environment & Architectural Culture Exhibition.

Designer: Bilgi Üniversitesi Görsel İletişim Bölümü

(İstanbul 2010 Avrupa Kültür Başkenti Ajansı projeleri afiş seçkisi, İstanbul : İstanbul 2010 Avrupa Kültür Başkenti Ajansı. 2011)