ARAB TOURIST EFFECT IN ISTANBUL: THE CASE OF BEYOGLU DISTRICT

DICLE KOYLAN

Sociology Department, Doğuş University, Istanbul, Turkey
E-mail: dkoylan@dogus.edu.tr

Abstract - Istanbul is a popular urban tourism destination which attracts many tourists each year. An urban space policy is pursued towards high income tourists who are mostly Arabs in Istanbul's historical districts. Therefore, a determinist relation appears between urban tourism and urban space. Urban space has been transformed according to expectations of tourists. We see this spatial transformation in the city with regard to tourist profile and their tastes most apparently in Beyoğlu district of Istanbul. However such spatial transformation in Beyoğlu has damaged its cultural atmosphere leading to erode its place identity.

Keywords - Istanbul, Place Identity, Spatial Transformation, Urban Policy, Urban Tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the principle factors to understand city and urban space.[1]Urban policies and private sector investments based upon tourist expectations transform urban areas and cities. While generating great income urban tourism changes the cities. Urban tourism is made of "both day-trippers and staying tourists. Likewise , urban tourism includes those visiting for both leisure and business."[2]

Istanbul as an urban tourism area, attracts many tourists from various countries. In its historical and touristic places, an urban space policy is pursued largely to meet the expectations and needs of high income tourists rather than local people. This study will focus on the relations between urban space and urban tourism considering transformation in the urban space according to tourist profile and their expectations, wishes, languages, cultures and life styles. The emphasis will be on Arab tourists who have come to Istanbul during the The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government and who have spent more foreign currency than the other tourists[3] .
There are several reasons for increasing number of Arab tourists visiting Istanbul. The fact that Turkey is being a Muslim country, AKP government's neoliberal conservative policies, publicity efforts of Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Turkish television series released on Arab countries, travel agents and tour operators marketing efforts can be considered among the reasons. (Mengü, 2012)[4]
In 2015, former mayor of Beyoğlu Municipality Ahmet MisbahDemircan said the reasons of preference of Arab tourists for Istanbul especially for Beyoğlu as: "People from the Gulf countries generally come to Istanbul. The living standards of the people over there are very high. They know the Western world well and its way of life. However, when they go to the West, they find it difficult to establish cultural affinity. In Istanbul, especially in Beyoğlu, they see the meeting of civilizations. Here, they find a Western spirit by both historical structures, service quality, and way of life and also hence Turkey being a Muslim country, they establish a proximity in various areas such as eating and drinking, customs, shopping, life style."[5]

Middle Eastern tourists are among the highest travel spending tourists in the world.[6]The fact that Arabs are one of the major tourist group from this area, and they spend considerably while visiting Istanbul, introduces new urban policies and practices for their needs. In the last decade from 2010 to now, we can talk about an Arab fashion that shaped the urban space policy in the historical and touristic areas of Istanbul. Especially Beyoğlu district in Istanbul, has become a center of attraction for Arab tourists as a result of urban tourism, urban policies and private sector initiatives.

II. SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION IN BEYOĞLU

Submit Beyoğlu is a popular Arab tourist destination in Istanbul. It is a historical area in the European side of Istanbul, on the north bank of the Golden Horn, from Karaköy (Galata) and the Galata Bridge to Taksim Square. It is a cultural center which has an aesthetic and historical value featuring artistic, cultural, entertainment activities. It is a residential area but also a main commercial, entertainment, consumption and

[1]S. J. Page, & C. M. Hall, (2003). Managing urban tourism. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

[2]M. Selby, (2004). Understanding urban tourism: Image, culture and experience. London: I B Tauris, p.14.

[3] Haberturk Newspaper article, https://www.haberturk.com/istanbul-a-4-ayda-en-cok-ve-en-az-gelen-turist-siralamasi-da-belli-oldu-2482087-ekonomi

[4]C. Mengü, (2012). "Türkiye- ArapDünyasıTurizmİlişkilerinde Durum veBeklentiler", OrtadoğuAnaliz, Haziran, 42(4), p.102-112

[5] Sabah Newspaper article, https://www.sabah.com.tr/pazar/2015/04/19/arap-dunyasinin-gozde-caddesi-istiklal?paging=2

[6]A. A. M. Ariffin, ve M. S Hasim,(2009). "Marketing Malaysia to the Middle East Tourists: Towards a Preferred Inter-regional Destinations", JurnalAntarabangsaKajian Asia Barat International Journal of West Asian Studies, Vol. 1,p. 39-53.

shopping area with restaurants, shops, cafes, music clubs, shopping mall etc. It is a heterogeneous public space of multiplicity, social and cultural diversity. It is a cosmopolitan district where Non-Muslims, Muslims, many expatriates from Europe and the US live together. There is a vivacious, commercially and culturally-active life in Beyoğlu which attracts everyday thousands of people and many tourists as well.

In Beyoğlu, rapid spatial and urban transformations has been observed for almost ten years. There are big urban transformation projects like Tarlabaşı district gentrification project. There are also large number of transformations in individual buildings like many renovation of old apartments. Furthermore, we observe many changes in space as many shops being closed and new ones taking instead.

According to David Harvey, urban space is constructed socially and the question is which social processes have an impact on it[7]. In late capitalism, the model of entrepreneurialism stands out in which the state acts through privatization and determines, constructs and reconstructs the urban space so it ends up with commodification of urban spaces [8]. Therefore, we see the impact of private sector in this transformation of urban spaces also articulating urban tourism to this spatial transformation.

In Istanbul, especially in Beyoğlu district, we have witnessed spatial transformations regarding to urban tourism more than ten years during the AKP government. Private sector entrepreneurships who have took part in Beyoğlu district has adopted themselves according to the tourist profile, especially according to Arabs who spend and do shopping more. In recent years, in Beyoğlu's most touristic street, Istiklal Street and its close vicinity, so many places have been opened fitting to the Arabs' preferences in food, entertainment and consumption. For example, we see many hookah cafes, dessert shops (especially baklava dessert), doner and kebap restaurants, opened in recent years in Beyoğlu district especially for Arabs and new ones are on the way. Many cafes, restaurants, buffets, bookstores are closed and now they are replaced by new luxurious dessert shops and hookah(water pipe) cafes. [9]

Many cultural and artistic institutions and venues were also closed down in Beyoğlu district. MuammerKaraca theatre, Atatürk Culture Center, Lale, Emek, Rüya, Alkazar, YeniMelek, Elhamra, Sinepop cinemas, State Theater Taksim Stage, Çiçek bar, and Kaktüs bars are closed. Well-known restaurants, bars, pubs like Otto, The House Cafe, Babylon, HayalKahvesi, Hardal and Delicatessen are replaced by hookah cafes especially for Arab tourists.[10]According to a newspaper article in Birgün, one of the main reasons of rapid spatial transformation in Beyoğlu district is the shift of tourist profile coming to Istanbul: "Culture, art and entertainment venues appealing to Western tourists disappeared one by one, and "Orient Tourism " oriented businesses came to their place."[11]Here, we should keep in mind that urban tourist profile is not an issue to blame, but transform a space according to expectation of tourists is problematic.

We also observed that almost everywhere we see Arabic signboards at shopwindows of cafes, restaurants, shops, travel agencies. Moreover, some of the restaurants and cafes have Arabic menus. Some of the store workers, waiters and service staff speak Arabic. These businesses prefer those who speak Arabic in recruitment or at least they try to hire an Arabic interpreter. Istiklal Street and its close vicinity is marked by Arabic signs and products for Arab tourists. There is a race of attracting Arab tourists because they spend more than any other tourists. The Arab tourists coming to our country leave about 5 times more foreign currency than a western family. [12] The average foreign exchange from an average Arab family per person is 4 thousand dollars and for the upper income group it is between 10 thousand and 50 thousand dollars.[13]

We have mentioned that transforming a space according to expectations of tourists is problematic because it is changing the environment and its cultural atmosphere. "Tourism industry often dramatically alters the built environment and thus the cultural landscape and cultural evolution of a host community." [14] We have seen this cultural landscape transformation in Beyoğlu case that most of the cultural places like book shops, theatres, cinemas, culture centers, art galleries, concert zones, bars are gone and instead new shops and restaurants, cafes are opened according to Arab tourists' tastes and expectations. A newspaper declares it as "In order to meet the demand of Arab

[7] D. Harvey, (1993). "From Space to Place and Back Again," Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change, ed. John Bird and others, London: Routledge, p.5

[8]D. Harvey, (1989)."From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism", Human Geography, v. 71, n.1, p. 3-17,

[9]Cumhuriyet Newspaper article, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/1065637/beyoglu-belediye-baskani-demircan-araplasma-esnaf-isguzarligi.html

[10]Cumhuriyet Newspaper article, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/582031/beyoglunun-gelecegi-karanlik-mi.html

[11]Birgün Newspaper article, https://www.birgun.net/haber/10-maddede-beyoglu-neden-bu-hale-geldi-123866

[12]Paratic article, https://paratic.com/en-fazla-dovizi-arap-turistler-birakiyor/

[13]TurizmGünlüğü web site article, https://www.turizmgunlugu.com/2018/02/02/sy-group-2018-hedefini-10-milyon-arap-turist-olarak-acikladi/

[14]M. Robinson,(2001). "Tourism Encounters: Inter – and Intra-Cultural Conflicts and the World's Largest Industry" in Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism, Ed: NezarAlsayyad, Oxon: Routledge, p. 52.

tourists, hookahs, kebab restaurants, raw meatballs places and dessert cafes were opened in place of the old food and beverage venues in Beyoğlu".[15]

Transformation of space according to tourist profile and its expectations put local identities of hosting cities in danger. "The development of tourism and its propensity to change the nature of places may also challenge cultural identities." [16] In Beyoglu case we have observed that students, intellectual youth, middle class and white collar people no longer prefer Beyoğlu for cultural activities, entertainment and night life.
An international broadcaster DW's article named this cultural change in Beyoğlu especially for Taksim square and its vicinity as "Taksim's journey from West to East" and continued: "Considered as the occidental modern face of Istanbul for decades, Taksim completely changed its face with the conservatization, mosque construction in Taksim square and Arab tourist influx during the AKP rule." [17]

We have seen this transformation especially in the main street which is the heart of Beyoğlu, İstiklal Street. Nowadays it resembles one of the streets of any Middle Eastern city. We hear Arabic language more than Turkish language, we see Arabic signs and menus, Arabic speaker salesmen in shops etc.

We note here an identity problem related to place. Kevin Lynch conceptualize it as "place identity": "The extent a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places, as having a vivid or unique, or at least particular character of its own." [18]

Cultural landscape has been transformed in Beyoğlu district therefore its place identity has been damaged. Many middle and upper class citizens no longer visit here for any reason, white collars moved away from here, popularity of this area among youth has decreased, it all ended with dispersion of entertainment and culture axis to other districts such as Beşiktaş, Karaköy and Kadıköy. Beyoğlu has almost lost its place identity, distinctive soul, its particular character of its own which included heterogeneity as being one of the main cultural area in Istanbul.

III. CONCLUSION

We could say that in Beyoğlu district and its close vicinity, there is "spatialization for "tourists", urban spaces are shaped in accordance with consumption, habits, lifestyles and expectations of tourists" [19] especially in accordance with Arab tourists. This rapid spatial transformation of Beyoğlu in the last decade of AKP government led also to a transformation in its profile of habitants and visitors. Old habitants and visitors have been changed. Beyoğlu is not as popular as it was among its old visitors.

Besides its modified user profile, cultural landscape and atmosphere has also been changed in Beyoğlu district. Therefore, place identity eroded in here. Nowadays Beyoğlu is an urban tourism destination which doesn't include its old citizens and locals, it has been replaced by mostly Arab tourists and theirs tastes, habits and lifestyles.

It would be a mistake to blame the tourist profile for spatial transformation whatever big and important the tourism industry and its revenue are. Neither we could show tourist profile as a problematic reason of spatial transformation in Beyoğlu. The main reason which causes problems such as erosion of place identity or modification of cultural landscape, is urban policy which does not aim to preserve the authentic, local culture and its identity but allow this transformation regarding Arab tourists and their culture without any control, restrictions or setting rules to subject spaces.

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[16] M. Robinson, Ibid, p. 51.

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[18] K. Lynch, (1981). Good City Form, MIT PRESS, Cambridge, MA., p.126

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