Chapter 11

The Role of Architecture on the Tourism Industry:
The Problem of (Mis)use of Building Technology and Language of Heritage

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to shed light on the nature of architecture, its technological and cultural ramifications on tourism industry. It elucidates the background of issues regarding the interaction between the fields of cultural production (architecture) and cultural consumption (tourism). The chapter argues that power of tourism industry has reached, under the pressure of global economics, to a capacity to turn even daily architecture into instruments of touristic show. In this context, technology is utilized as an instrument to produce such iconography only as a surface articulation. Thus, architecture becomes a commodity of touristic consumption in this current socio-economic and cultural context. The pressure of tourism industry seems to create a significant split between the architecture and its location in terms of specific cultural roots. This tendency is discussed as a potential threat to sustainability of tourism industry itself since it damages its own very source, that is to say, richness of cultural differences.

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the relationships among tourism management, approaches, global tourism trends and technology, this chapter aims to cast light on the status of architecture and its technological as well as cultural ramifications on the ongoing tendencies in tourism industry (Adorno, 1991). The main focus of this chapter is on the use of global building technologies at the peril of local architecture which is a cultural asset for tourism (Bourdieu, 1993). In other words, building technology is tackled as a means which interferes in between tourism and heritage, and disturbs their natural, or rather, organic relationship (Fowler, 1993). Along this purpose, the economic, social, cultural and philosophical background of this disturbance is elucidated with specific reference to the field of architecture (Lasansky, 2004).
Tourism, as one of the most rapidly growing sectors in the world in regard to economical, technological and social transformations, facilitates significant interactions and transactions among different countries (MacCannell, 1999). After various successive stages of evolution and self-criticism in regard to the issues of excessive consumption (Slater, 1999) and thus loss of natural and cultural resources, targets of tourism has started to be shifted from an industry that was developed along the axis of 3S (sun, sand, sea) mass tourism which has been isolated from the culture and economy of the loci, towards one that is organized along the axis of 3E (education, entertainment, environment) under the influence of increasing concern for issues such as sustainability, conservation of both heritage and nature, etc. (Ellul, 1997). Thus, impact of tourism on tangible and intangible assets of cultural heritage has been placed to the center of tourism industry (Chambers, 1997; Pickard, 2001). In that regard, relationships between tourism, city planning, heritage conservation, restoration and architecture (Baud-Bovy & Lawson, 1998; Var & Gunn, 2002) have gained utmost importance particularly from the viewpoint of sociological impacts of tourism activity on the cities it is performed (Ockman, 2005). On another yet parallel line, architecture has taken the lead in tourism as the main object of touristic activity and has recently generated a specialized type called architecture tourism whereby specialist trips are organized around the cities worldwide to visit contemporary buildings designed by well-known architects as well as historically important or traditionally characteristic buildings (Kahvecioglu & Ciravoglu, 2007).

Tourism movement, which boomed particularly during 1980s, introduced a very dense and over urbanization causing; not only major damages to coastal zones via massive constructions, but also to local life by means of conversion of local economies for only tourists, which gradually resulting in the decline of these towns during off-seasons, and eventually destroying both local economy and social life. Nonetheless, despite many negative consequences, tourism activity continued its growth and became the center of global social, cultural and economic life. Therefore, the phenomenon of tourism, in which diverse parameters play complex roles, necessitates an intense interaction among sectors and disciplines. Among these disciplines, architecture stands out as a leading actor since it not only facilitates investments, synthesizes the requirements of comfort and entertainment or organizes activities, technologies and spaces, but also creates identities and produces the imagery and iconography associated with branding of the tourism investors. Today, hence, tourism industry and architecture are in a comprehensive and very close interaction.

As a matter of fact, authentically historical architectural edifices have always triggered tourism (Stoller, 1989) by their values as either being witnesses to historical events, or representing various phenomena, or merely by their monumentality, originality or other assets. These unique masterpieces or contexts used to render certain destinations more advantageous over the others. Thus, relatively disadvantageous locations in terms of touristic attractions have developed various strategies to overcome their position by the utilization of architecture again (Donald, 2007) due to its representation capacity. One of these strategies has been to create their own iconic symbols through contemporary architecture and its new forms by well-known designers, who are promoted as celebrities, while the other strategy being to simulate unique buildings and cities in these inopportune places which has no relevance to the location of the original. Recently, tourism industry seems to be promoting not only fake copies of historically important or well-known buildings, cities but also their kitsch and eclectic collage, such as monuments, pyramids, palaces, urban plazas and even the whole city of Venice in resorts. The consequences of this trend, which is referred as ‘Las Vegas effect’ or ‘WoW effect’,