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Perceptions of Local People Regarding Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture

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Abstract: Istanbul has been declared the European Capital of Culture in 2010, due to its past as the cradle of many civilizations and host to various cultures. Today, Istanbul still includes a variety of cultures, ethnic backgrounds, religions and socio-cultural levels. People with different origins, languages, beliefs and traditions are living together in the city. As Istanbul has received in recent years large numbers of migrants from other parts of Turkey, the gap between the lifestyles of residents has widened. Therefore, this research aims to determine the perceptions of Istanbul's inhabitants, who have highly diversified identities and lifestyles, regarding the city as a European Capital of Culture. A scale to measure the construct of European Capital of Culture is also proposed.

Keywords: European; Capital of Culture; Istanbul; City; Local Perceptions.

Resumen: Estambul ha sido declarada Capital Europea de la Cultura para el año 2010, debido a su pasado como cuna de diferentes civilizaciones y dueña de diversas culturas. Hoy Estambul incluye aún una gran variedad de culturas, etnias, religiones y niveles socioculturales. Gente de diversos orígenes, lenguas, creencias y tradiciones viven juntos en la ciudad. Debido al gran número de inmigrantes de otras partes de Turquía que Estambul ha recibido en los últimos años, la diferencia entre los estilos de vida de los residentes se ha incrementado. Por lo tanto, esta investigación aspira a determinar las percepciones de los habitantes de Estambul que gozan de diversas identidades y estilos de vida, en relación a esta ciudad como Capital Europea de la Cultura. También se propone una escala para medir el concepto de Capital Europea de la Cultura.

Palabras clave: Europea; Capital de la Cultura; Estambul; Ciudad; Percepciones de los lugareños.

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Introduction

Istanbul has been the meeting point of various cultures and has been hosting different civilizations for centuries. With its rich historical and cultural heritage, as well as its culture and art life, Istanbul has been attracting the attention of the world. Istanbul has also achieved an increasingly important financial position as the economic hub of Turkey, drawing investment through its strategic location. In recent years, a rapidly increasing number of cultural activities, such as international music and film festivals, biennials, and exhibitions of world famous artists, provide recognition to the city in the international culture arena. Economically, Istanbul is remarkable from various aspects, including its large potential manpower, increasing foreign investments and stock exchange. Finally, Turkey's temporary membership in the United Nation's Security Council and the ongoing negotiations with the European Union render the country politically crucial. As such, Istanbul, the most famous city of Turkey, gets its share from this popularity through international submissions and congresses at high level politics. As a result of this increasing fame and its ancient roots in history, Istanbul has received the title of European Capital of Culture for the year 2010 (ECOC 2010) and cultural activities in the city have accelerated because of this event.

Istanbul is highly diversified in terms of economic, social and political structures. Especially in spatially-segregated areas, cultural exchange and recognition is crucial to prevent disconnection between social segments (Yardimci, 2007). Yardimci (2007) states that if diverse identities and cultures do not form a combined urban culture, there would be multiple cities rather than multiplicity, which would result in fragmentation and polarization. This statement is also true for Istanbul, considering the highly secured luxury villas next to *varoş* (the Turkish term for slum areas) regions or the rising skyscrapers right opposite the *gecekondu* (the Turkish term for illegally constructed shanty houses). Considering all these, it can be questioned whether the scope of ECOC 2010 Istanbul is broad

enough to cover all layers of society, or whether it is just targeting a limited segment of residents with its upscale and advanced-artistic activities. The ECOC program, to be successful and achieve its aims, should embrace all the layers of the society and communicate with them. However, popular cultural events, such as biennials and international music and film festivals, are only targeting people with cultural and monetary capital (Yardimci, 2007).

The studies that have so far examined cities selected as European Capital of Culture have mainly focused on the activities, the process, and the results of the event. Economic outcomes have also been given attention, especially regarding the increase in number of visitors to the cities. The question of how the local people thought and felt about their cities as a culture capital has not been taken into consideration yet. Thus, the purpose of this research is to learn the perceptions of local residents with different education and income levels, and from various districts regarding Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture. Furthermore, the study also attempts to derive a scale to measure the concept of European Capital of Culture, which may be useful for other cities to investigate how they are perceived in this respect.

Literature Review

To be able to analyze the subject of European Capital of Culture in depth, it is first necessary to look closer to the concept of culture itself and what it includes. There is a variety of definitions of culture evolving and changing in time.

As discussed by Williams (1958, cited in Smith, 2003), culture can be said to be ordinary because every human society has its own shape, its own meanings, its own purposes and these societies use institutions, arts and learning to express themselves. According to Hannerz (1990, as cited in Smith, 2003) the world culture is created through the combination of varied local cultures and their development. Culture is referred as a whole way of life, the special processes of discovery and creative effort (Williams, 1958, as cited in Smith, 2003). The term culture does not only address the

elite and educated class in the society, but embraces the society as a whole. As stated by Arnold (1875, as cited in Smith, 2003), culture is about the lives and interests of ordinary people, both rural and urban dwellers, indigenous or immigrant communities, artists and artisans.

While explaining the term culture, the concept of city should not be omitted, as cities are the fundamentals of culture throughout history. They are the places where people gather together, interact with each other, form groups and share a common life. To be able to assess a city as a cultural city, it should possess values differentiating it. These assets of the city are categorized in two cultural dimensions as tangible and intangible (Uraz, 2007). Tangible ones include the architecture, historical heritage, museums, libraries, squares, holly places and all the other physical structures adding value to it. Intangible elements are traditions, values, cuisine, music, religions, art, the existence of multi cultures, and the preservation of these assets. Furthermore, the living culture and human aspects should not be forgotten. Festivals, sports organizations, biennials, cinema, opera, theaters and exhibitions are indispensable elements of the culture of a city. Thus, the visual and the organizational aspects of the built environment interact, making it difficult and undesirable to separate them (Lozano, 1990).

The European Union Culture Commission launched the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) Program in 1985 for the purpose of preserving Europe's past, increasing awareness, generating an environment for the development of culture and cooperating with non-member countries for ensuring the effectiveness of European culture throughout the world (Richards, 1996). Besides, "the ECOC Program has been a significant catalyst for the culture-led regeneration" (Griffith, 2005: 1). Although the initial aim of the program was to bring the citizens of the European Union together, the social and the economic effects became increasingly important (Uraz, 2007).

Richards (1999) mentions that being European Capital of Culture does not depend only on cultural resources, but also on cultural competence. Smith (2003) claims that including the development of popular

new attractions and preservation of existing features is expected from host cities. Moreover, ECOC requires the cultural heritage and regional cultural activities to be made accessible to everyone.

It is beneficial to take a closer look at two successful European Capital of Culture events, Lille and Glasgow. The reason why wide public involvement during the ECOC event was so much valued in Lille is the city's rich multi-cultural structure. The outcomes of the event included increased media attendance, numerous public and artistic events, and a 39% increase in annual cultural visits (Sacco and Blessi, 2006, as cited in Uraz, 2007). On the other hand, authorities in Glasgow mainly focused on the sustainability aspect, which is one of the success factors for the ECOC event. With the ECOC program, Glasgow intended to enhance its cultural development by integrating the public in the process. After the ECOC program, Glasgow became a well-known destination for cultural tourism and a centre for conference and conventions (Garcia, 2005; Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004; Uraz, 2007).

Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture

With its heritage, art and creative industries, Istanbul is competing with the European cities of Berlin, Madrid, London and Rome as stated by an ETC Report (2005). According to Beyazit and Tosun (2006), the city's identity and its activities enhance its competitive capabilities. Its strategic location and commercial identity have linked Istanbul to European culture throughout history. It has remained the Christian and Islamic capital in the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires for nearly 16 centuries (Beyazit & Tosun, 2006). Some of the culturally rich and lively neighborhoods of Istanbul, which were Muslim districts around the imperial mosques and Jewish and Christian settlements on the Golden Horn, began to decline in the early days of the Turkish Republic. Furthermore, rapid population increase has created infrastructure problems, as Istanbul has grown from a population of approximately one million in the early years of the Republic, to a city of 12 million inhabitants in the year 2009 (TURKSTAT, 2009).

The main factor that helps differentiate cities from each other is their spirit (Karlığa, 2009). The spirit of the city gives its own identity and its main color, and it ascribes its basic characteristics to the place (Karlığa, 2009). To take a closer look at Istanbul, the city has been hosting numerous people from different ethnic roots, nationalities, and religions for centuries, showing its multiculturalism. It has witnessed the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, with their traditions, cuisines, arts, religions and life styles. They have enriched the soul of Istanbul, which can be defined as the accumulation of all the history, cultures and lives it has witnessed.

Istanbul possesses many tangible elements reflecting its rich and differentiating culture. Turkish Cuisine is an important cultural and historical element since it is one of the oldest and richest cuisines in the world. In Istanbul, one has the opportunity to enjoy all different tastes of Anatolian and Ottoman cuisines in numerous restaurants. As discussed by Barutcugil (2009), Istanbul is also the capital of vein and calligraphy art, another cultural asset of the city. Development of vein art has enriched the city both culturally and historically, considering the historical root of this art. Furthermore, Tokaç (2009) states that Istanbul is the host city of Turkish music culture. Furthermore, cultural diversity has contributed to the structure of music in Istanbul. An important point highlighted by this author is that, especially in the 1980's, arabesque music has developed as a sub-culture, representing the lifestyle and perceptions of rural immigrants to Istanbul. Cinema is also an important asset of the Istanbul culture. Kabil (2009) indicates that one-fourth of all 1000 cinemas in Turkey are located in this city. Istanbul has accelerated its development in relation to cinema through diverse film festivals, especially in recent years. Actually, not only movie, but other types of festivals and biennials are growing and increasing in Istanbul, which provides an important indicator regarding the developing cultural activities in the city. Foreign institutions in Istanbul also serve as cultural elements since they are enriching the culture of the city. Tosun, Öztürk and Özpınar (2009) state that these institutions introduce their

own culture, art and language while strengthening the links between two cultures. The availability of various libraries is another cultural element of Istanbul. Libraries are 'community centers' because they are centers of education, culture and socialization (Bayir, 2009).

Istanbul is also rich in historical heritage places. However, there is lack of consciousness in the protection of the cultural heritage. UNESCO calls attention to this problem because Istanbul's culture is recognized also in the international arena and the Historical Peninsula has been accepted as a world heritage asset in 1985.

Istanbul has lately been rising in many aspects in the international arena. The city has benefitted from a favorable national economic environment, triggered by a broad and continuous reform process, and thus it has strengthened its position on the international marketplace (OECD, 2008). Furthermore, Istanbul has established itself as the industrial, financial and logistics centre of the country, producing almost one-third of the national output and absorbing the bulk of foreign direct investment (OECD, 2008).

On the other hand, the city has been facing some shortcomings, which may affect its goal of becoming a hub for logistics, finance, culture and tourism in the Euro-Asia Region. The economy is changing to become more knowledge-intensive from labor-intensive, while traditional and labor-intensive sectors (e.g., textiles) are shifting only gradually and slowly to other complementary industry segments (OECD, 2008). Furthermore, productivity levels have been negatively affected by the informal sector (OECD, 2008). Migration to Istanbul from other cities of Turkey is also a burden hardening the life in the city because of over population. Other issues include insufficiency of the transportation system, infrastructure and illegal housing named as *gecekondu*. There are new projects addressing these problems, such as the Marmaray Project for traffic congestion, relocation of workshops off of the peninsula and the introduction of an efficient integrated tariff management to promote mass transportation.

Considering that Istanbul is going to be the largest ECOC to date, and the bigger

the city is the more complex the structure gets, the cultural program implementation of Istanbul ECOC 2010 requires a well-defined job description and an effective and efficient management (Uraz, 2007). Local authorities' performance will be crucial to the success of the event. As Istanbul is highly diversified regarding its economic, social and political structures, the ECOC program, to be successful and reach its aims, should embrace and communicate with all the layers of society. Socio-cultural backgrounds are expected to influence how people perceive Istanbul as a cultural city. This results from the fact that the city is shelter to millions of people from different origins, religions, cultural backgrounds and income levels. To be able to understand the socio-spatial polarization (Yardimci, 2007) better, it is necessary to look at Turkey's near past. *Gecekondu* and *varoş* have been one of the major controversial issues of Turkey. The *gecekondu* districts have enlarged after the 1950s due mainly to the ambiguity of the national and local administrators to the topic and their aim to use the situation to increase their political support (Ahiska and Yenil, 2006).

While talking about the term *gecekondu*, it is also necessary to explain another term that is correlated with this output of urban life style, which is *arabesk*. At the beginning, this terminology was used just for defining a specific music type, but later it was generalized to describe the immigrant culture located in suburban areas in Turkey (Gurbilek, 1992). At the end of the 1960s it meant the expression of the aspirations of the people who lived in these *gecekondu* houses in the *varoş* areas (Özbek, 1999). In the 1980s, this music type was representing those who were detached from their cultures, meaning the immigrants to the city (Gurbilek, 1992). On the other hand, with their music and its explosion, these new residents became more visible in public life (Ahiska & Yenil, 2006). As a result *arabesk* can be defined as a sub-culture appearing as the outcome of fast modernization and migration to big cities. As Ahiska and Yenil (2006) empha-

ize, the immigrants have become a dominant element in the demographic and the cultural structure in rapidly growing cities such as Istanbul and Ankara.

Given the social and demographic polarization of Istanbul, and the requirement of the ECOC event to permeate to all layers of society, the study attempts to understand the perceptions of the local people regarding Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out through a survey aimed at determining the views of the local people in Istanbul regarding the city as a European Capital of Culture. Therefore, in order to measure these perceptions, a scale was derived from the literature (Beyazıt & Tosun, 2006; Griffith, 2005; Karlığa, 2009; Lozano, 1990; Smith, 2003; Tokaç, 2009; Tosun et al., 2009; Uraz, 2007). The measure was designed to be independent from the ECOC concept as defined by the European Union. Demographic characteristics were also included in the questionnaire in order to analyze the perceptions of different sectors of society.

Judgmental sampling was used in order to obtain demographic diversity in the sample. Therefore, regions where people from different education and income levels could be reached were determined, namely *Nişantaşı*, *Taksim*, *Besiktaş*, *Üsküdar*, *Hisarüstü* and *Umraniye*. In order to increase the response rate, the places where people enjoyed spending their free time, such as shopping areas and entertainment centers, were chosen. Furthermore, the places of residence of respondents were categorized into three groups according to the luxury level of the regions and the income level of the people living there. As can be seen in Table 1, the sample is evenly distributed into these regions, showing the diversity obtained. In total, 159 valid questionnaires were obtained (refer to Table 1 for a detailed break down of the sample).

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		

Istanbul has rich exhibitions in the museums	.76								
The museum exhibitions reflect the culture of Istanbul	.69								
There is a high quantity of museums in Istanbul	.68								
Atmosphere and Architecture									
The city's atmosphere reflects the history of Istanbul	.90								
The city's atmosphere reflects the culture of Istanbul	.80								
The architecture in the city reflects the culture and history of Istanbul	.60								
Arts and Festivals									
The festivals in Istanbul are rich in terms of content	.77								
Istanbul is a city which has been raising art and artists	.73								
Art organizations are appealing to all segments of the population	.69								
Festivals are appealing to all segments of the population	.58								
Cuisine and Musical Culture									
Palace cuisine is important in traditional Turkish cuisine	.82								
Turkish music contributes to Istanbul's musical culture	.81								
In Istanbul all tastes of Turkish cuisine are available	.74								
Historical Heritage									
There are many sites from the Ottoman era in Istanbul	.80								
Istanbul is rich in terms of historical sites	.80								
There are many sites from the Byzantine era in Istanbul	.80								
Religion									
In Istanbul there are holy places for all religions and beliefs	.82								
All beliefs and religions are represented in Istanbul	.77								
Holy places in Istanbul may also be visited for non-religious purposes	.67								
Musical Variety									
You can listen to all types of music in Istanbul	.87								
It is possible to listen to worldwide music types in Istanbul	.86								
Cultural Diversity									
Different cultures living in Istanbul interact with each other	.79								
The atmosphere of Istanbul includes all cultures	.71								
Foreign Cultural Institutions									
Foreign cultural institutions contribute to Istanbul's cultural accumulation and wealth									0.9
In Istanbul there are many cultural institutions									0.7
Cronbach's Alpha	.78	.80	.77	.80	.72	.83	.69	.60	.60
Eigenvalues	5.64	2.80	2.23	1.97	1.70	1.43	1.20	1.03	1.00
Percentage of Variance Explained (cumulative)	21.7	33.0	41.7	48.7	55.0	60.7	65.4	69.3	73.0

Kaiser-Meyer-Olin = 0.705; Barlett's Test of Sphericity – Significance = 0.000

Table 2. Factor Analysis of the European Capital of Culture, Cultural Dimension

	1	2
Geography, History and Culture		
Geographically, Istanbul is a European city	.85	

Historically, Istanbul is a European city	.75	
Culturally, Istanbul is a European City	.64	
Life Style and Population Distribution		
Istanbul is a European city in terms of its population distribution	.87	
Istanbul is a European city in terms of the life style of its people	.79	
Cronbach's Alpha	.71	.68
Eigenvalues	2.54	1.01
Percentage of Variance Explained (cumulative)	50.82	71.18
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.737; Barlett's Test of Sphericity – Significance = 0.000		

Table 3. Factor Analysis of the European Capital of Culture, European Dimension

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural Dimension		
Museums and Libraries	3.52	.76
Atmosphere and Architecture	3.56	.95
Art and Festivals	3.47	.81
Cuisine and Musical Culture	4.00	.79
Historical Heritage	4.31	.63
Religion	4.10	.65
Musical Variety	3.97	.85
Cultural Diversity	3.62	.86
Foreign Institutions	3.58	.81
European Dimension		
Geography, History and Culture	3.76	.81
Lifestyle and Population Distribution	3.00	1.06

Table 4. Perceptions of Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture

The difference between respondents with various educational backgrounds was analyzed using Oneway Analysis of Variance. Education is found to significantly distinguish among the groups in relation to two factors under the Cultural Dimension, *Museums and libraries* ($F = 7.33$; $p = 0.000$), and *Historical heritage* ($F = 5.86$; $p = 0.001$). Moreover, both factors under the European Dimension, *Geography, history and culture* ($F = 5.39$; $p = 0.001$, and *Lifestyle and population* ($F = 3.37$; $p = 0.02$) are also perceived differently. Descriptive results show that the least educated and the most educated people have more negative perceptions as opposed to those that possess a medium level of education. Similarly, individuals with diverse education levels have a varied level of awareness regarding cultural activities in Istanbul ($F = 15.99$; $p = 0.000$), and their perceived involvement in these is also different ($F = 8.67$; $p = 0.000$). According to the descriptive statistics, the most educated individuals have the highest level of awareness and per-

ceived involvement, whereas the least educated people have the lowest level. These results indicate that since the most educated people's awareness and level of involvement in cultural activities are higher, they are also more knowledgeable about these issues and can criticize these aspects better and be aware of negative sides. So, their perceptions are more negative. On the other hand, the least educated people have not enough knowledge because of their low level of awareness and involvement in cultural activities. Accordingly, their perceptions are found to be relatively more negative.

A significant difference in awareness and perceived involvement is also found for respondents with diverse places of residence and monthly household income. People from the lower regions have the lowest level of awareness ($F = 11.51$; $p = 0.000$) and perceived involvement ($F = 9.26$; $p = 0.000$) in cultural activities in the city. In contrast, people living in the other two relatively higher class regions have signifi-

cantly higher scores in these variables. Similarly, there is a significant difference between respondents with diverse income levels in relation to their awareness ($F = 5.22$; $p = 0.000$) and perceived involvement in cultural activities ($F = 3.66$ $p = 0.004$).

Further analysis showed that awareness is significantly correlated with some cultural dimensions of the European Capital of Culture Concept. People with the highest level of awareness about Istanbul's cultural activities also have the most positive perceptions regarding Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture in relation to the dimensions of *Arts and festivals* ($r = 0.26$; $p = 0.001$), *Historical heritage* ($r = 0.29$; $p = 0.000$), *Religion* ($r = 0.26$; $p = 0.001$), *Musical variety* ($r = 0.28$; $p = 0.000$), *Cuisine and musical culture* ($r = 0.2$; $p = 0.01$), and *Cultural diversity* ($r = 0.2$; $p = 0.01$).

A correlation analysis indicated that people's ECOC perspectives are significantly correlated with some of the cultural dimensions and all of the European dimensions. People who think Istanbul is suitable for the ECOC title as determined by the EU Cultural Commission also agree that Istanbul possesses the cultural elements which are *Museums and libraries* ($r = 0.32$; $p = 0.000$), *Atmosphere and architecture* ($r = 0.32$; $p = 0.000$) and *Art and festivals* ($r = 0.3$; $p = 0.000$), and the European elements of *Geography, History and Culture*, ($r = 0.52$; $p = 0.000$) and *Lifestyle and population distribution* ($r = 0.5$; $p = 0.000$). These findings result on interesting implications that will be discussed in the following section.

Conclusions and Implications

The study determines that Istanbul is, as Yardımcı (2007) states, marked by socio-spatial polarization, and that cultural exchange and recognition is crucial to prevent disconnection between social segments. The research also supports Yardımcı's (2007) claim that popular cultural events in Istanbul only target people who have cultural and monetary capital. Our results establish that monthly household income and education are significant indicators of the awareness and level of involvement in cultural activities, also influencing how the Istanbul residents perceive their city as a European

Capital of Culture.

The experience of previous ECOC cities has established that focusing on local residents is crucial for this event to reach its major aim. Defining target audience groups clearly and integrating local people in this organization (Glasgow City Council, 1992) makes the event successful, by providing the participation of the real owners of the city and rendering the effects of the organization sustainable. Thus, Istanbul can be more successful in the period as European Capital of Culture if communication with the local people is established, and they are made aware of the activities undertaken. The results of our study showed that once people learn about the cultural assets of Istanbul and form, as Karlığa (2009) says, a common memory and consciousness about their city, they have the tendency to have more positive perceptions regarding Istanbul. This means that Istanbul has a good starting point for this organization, and if good communication and integration of all people are provided, the objectives of the event can be reached.

There are certain bodies that are responsible for the Istanbul ECOC 2010 event, like the Foundation for the Culture and Arts (Istanbul Kultur ve Sanat Vakfı), the Istanbul 2010 Agency, the municipalities and the local representatives of the Ministry for Culture and Tourism. These establishments and authorities should provide the integration of all residents to the cultural activities organized for Istanbul ECOC 2010. Besides, through market segmentation, the audience groups should be clearly defined and municipalities should ensure effective communication. Especially, people with lower education level should be targeted to ensure their participation. Additionally, the residents' political opinions regarding Turkey's membership to the European Union was asked to see if this view was related to their perceptions regarding Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture. However, the result showed that the political opinion on this topic was not related to the perceptions of Istanbul as a European Capital of Culture.

The study also proposes a scale to measure the construct of European Capital of Culture that includes both cultural and European aspects. This measure can be

used to understand local perceptions of, not necessarily a European Capital of Culture determined according to the criteria of the European Union's Culture Program, but any European city which can be considered as a culture capital. Additional research may further refine the scale, also through the use of confirmatory factor analysis.

To conclude, the study showed that the perceptions of residents of Istanbul regarding their city as a European Capital of Culture tend to be positive, although they change according to the social and economic background of the individual. If the target market of the Istanbul ECOC 2010 organization is broadened in order to cover and include all people from different layers of society, the event would reach its real aim and thus be more successful.

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