

**Global cities as centers of cultural influence:
a focus on Istanbul, Turkey**

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Abstract

In different eras, cities such as Babylon, Athens, Rome, London, Madrid and Paris have been highly influential in the development of world culture. In the Fordist and Post-Fordist periods, the primary global culture transmitters have been centered in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Tokyo and London. As the world becomes increasingly more connected and different 'geographies' develop, it is inevitable that new global cultural centers will surface to challenge, replace or augment these existing centers. Some of the driving forces behind the predominance of global cultural transmittal centers are the existence of a vibrant and substantial cultural economy, the high level of connection with the global cultural network and the character/level of capital accumulation within these cities. A possible candidate for one of these new cultural centers could be Istanbul due to: 1) the recent regional changes in the economic and geo-political climate; and 2) its unique geographical location, being at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. This paper will explore the role of global cultural centers, the importance of a city's cultural economy, and the position/potential of Istanbul within the evolving global culture.

Key Words: globalization, cultural economy, global cities, Istanbul

Introduction

Cities for over three thousand years have been the centers of culture and creativity. They have been the foci where the human and material resources of civilizations have been concentrated. Artists, musicians, architects, philosophers, scientists and writers have gravitated toward certain cities due to numerous forces such as patrons, community of artists, universities, clients, and a skilled workforce. The elusive environment of certain cities also seem to play a significant factor in drawing creative individuals to them. The urban centers of culture have changed throughout the centuries mostly based on their economic/political strength with the outside world. The cultural impact of Athens, Amsterdam, Rome, Vienna, London, Paris, Madrid, Istanbul (Constantinople), Florence, Venice, Milan, Budapest, Barcelona, Prague and Berlin still resonate in our present world culture. The catalyst in the globalization of culture is the highly sophisticated and fast communication network. This technology appears to be developing at an accelerating rate. Its development is changing world culture and the role of cities that are functioning as cultural transmitters.

In the Fordist and Post-Fordist era, very few would dispute that the United States has been a key transmitter of world culture. The cities of New York and Los Angeles have been dominant in developing this culture. London, Paris and Milan have augmented, interacted and contributed to this American dominated global culture. In the past 20 years, Tokyo has also contributed to this global culture by being a center of technology. However, there are some interesting developments due to the increasing interconnection due to the Internet and the emerging digital environment. The voices of many cultures are being felt in an increasingly networked world. Thus, there is a developing global network (17), but the perception that there may be 'global command centers' that direct the global economy and likewise global culture as promoted by Sassen (27) may be simplistic. What is more probable is that there is a hierarchy of cities contributing to the transmittal and formation of global culture. Those outside of the select cities are primarily receivers of culture and only peripherally contributing to the evolution of global culture

Istanbul is presently one of the most populated urban areas in the world (35). Istanbul has aspirations for global city status, but presently could not be classified among the primary or secondary global cultural centers. There have been developments such as the potential membership of Turkey to the E.U., the emerging economies of Central Asia and Russia and the developing Turkish economy which could be conditions for the reemergence of Istanbul as a major cultural center. Istanbul's location at a key juncture between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia would seem to be a crucible for creativity and cultural development. The centrality of Istanbul is the primary reasons that the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empire chose this site as of their capital. However, in the first part of the 20th Century, Istanbul lost its status as a major cultural center due to dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the transferal of the capital of the Turkish Republic to Ankara. The marginality of Istanbul was further reinforced by the Cold War. The Communist Block and Turkey's role in NATO essentially stopped any cultural interchange with countries formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, such as Bulgaria and those in Central Asia, many of which were closely associated with Turkish culture by

language, religion and traditions. Relatively recent developments, as previously mentioned, have the potential to reestablish Istanbul again as a significant contributing cultural center. In this paper, we will first explore the somewhat murky world of globalization and culture and then examine Istanbul's present and future place within the network of global cultural centers.

Cities as the transmitters of culture and centers of creativity

In the past, cultures may have been contained within regions or national borders. With the increasing rate of communication, cultures are being rapidly mixed on a global scale. The influence of music, art, consumer products, architecture, food and other elements of culture are global. Today, Mathews (20) conjectures that the world is a 'cultural supermarket' where different individuals across the globe decide what items of other cultures that they want to adopt or reject. However, does global cultural formation consist of individuals choosing freely or something extremely more complex?

Culture is innately geographical. It emanates from one place or another. Culture may be based in a peripheral area, but is packaged or reformulated by cultural centers for distribution into the global culture. Cities have always been the place where artisans, intellectuals, writers, musicians and philosophers gravitate. Lewis Mumford states that "The city is both a physical utility for collective living and a symbol of those collective purposes and unanimities that arise under favoring circumstances. (17)".

Hall (13) was one of the first to speculate that certain cities or 'global cities' dominate the global economy. If we consider that economy includes cultural goods, then these would also be the ones that dominate in this field also. The connection between capital accumulation in certain key cities can be linked with the dissemination of cultural goods such as music, clothes, film and food. The international film industry is now concentrated in a few number of nations. The dominance of Hollywood has resulted in the demise of the film industry in many nations. This is particularly true for the national film industries of Europe (34).

There are key world cities that appear to be the major centers of global culture. Beaverstock et al. (1) rank cities into classes of Alpha, Beta and Gamma from a selection of 55 world cities. The Alpha cities are : London, Paris, New York and Tokyo The second rank Alpha cities are Chicago, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Milan, Singapore Are these also the cities that influence global culture? One could say that music is influenced by New York and Los Angeles. World fashion is influenced by Los Angeles, New York, Paris and Milan. Hong Kong, Singapore, and Frankfurt may be financial centers, but they are not known for influencing world culture. World globalization of food types has been mostly spread by corporations based in the United States and Europe. These companies usually have marketing firms based in New York and Chicago. It should be noticed that many of these cities are large cities, but not among the mega-cities, cities over five million population (see Table 1).

There could be some speculation that the size of the city is not really important to its global influence. The key difference is the type of workforce and the infrastructure in

any given city. This is witnessed by the significant number of mega-cities in the developing world such as Mexico City, Mumbai or Sao Paulo (see Table 1) which have very large populations, but are not cultural transmitters. They may be attracting some of the creative class of a nation or region but at the same time they are attracting a large number of low skilled and low income laborers. The pressing needs of providing adequate infrastructure, housing needs and other problems are hampering these cities' entry into the hierarchy of main global cultural centers. In a large majority of cases, this intellectual capital is being drawn to the creative centers of North America and Europe.

Technology is transforming the role of cities. The communication network is placing almost all places within the global communications network. The cultural centers are the driving force in this network. One of the key elements is the electronic transmittal of information through the Internet. Sassen (28) contends that the digitization of the world economy and culture is lessening the distance for many cities and placing them more with the global economy and culture than the local. However, there is still a need for personal contact. The agglomeration and the quality of those located at a particular city is the necessary component for a place being a major cultural center.

The cultural economy of cities and creative cities

A cultural urban center is somewhat based on the number of people, but is also based on the composition of the city. The driving force for creative cities is the presence of the amount in the 'creative class'. The foremost promoter of the development of the creative class is Richard Florida as presented in his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (7). It is contended that certain cities are more centers of creativity than others. These are based on several criteria. Florida states that cities that are creative growth poles are those that: are more tolerant of various lifestyles; possess numerous cultural/entertainment attractions, have vibrant economies in other areas (such as high technology) and have other elusive qualities that attractive creative individuals (8).

Scott (29) details the elements of the cultural economy and its role in cities. He like many before him recognizes that the city has always had an influential role in the development of culture. Scott states that there is a convergence of world cities and those that influence the developing global culture. Cultural products he contends can be not only writing, art, music, theater, but can be extended to other industries such as furniture, automobiles, multi-media, computer graphics, book publishing, music recording etc. There are a number of cities that are dominating this New Economy. He asserts that the cultural industries of a city are very important to its future economic welfare.

Kotkin (16) looks to the examples of other cities in the past such as Rome, Florence and Venice for a guide for what makes cities cultural centers:

The greatest competitive advantage of cities, both in the past and today, lies in this creative edge. As cultural, technical, and social concepts collided on the urban stage of meeting houses and marketplaces, cities gave birth to writing, the evolution of art, abstract concepts, and mathematics, thus giving the city a predominant role in the development of world culture. Imperial Rome absorbed from traveling Greeks and Egyptians much of their cultural and technical legacy upon which it built its own brilliant civilization. Similarly, the great trading and artisan cities of the

Renaissance such as Florence and Venice are now remembered not chiefly for their business success, but for their enduring legacies of art, literature, and architecture legacies that flowered during the era of their effervescent commercial growth

The key factors as listed by Kotkin are not just that global cultural centers are major financial centers, but that they are mixing places for different ideas. The Renaissance culture that flourished in Florence and Venice was due to these cities being crossroads between the East and the West. Jerusalem which has been the birth place of three major world religions was at the crossroads of several civilizations.

Does the advanced communication network, particularly the Internet, and the development of global city network separating cities into city-states which are disassociating themselves from their regional and national economy? Hartzog (14) states:

..global cities take on a distinct identity as they disconnect from their regional geography. If this is reflected in cultural reproduction then we can expect to see changes in people's sense of identity. We might find individuals thinking of themselves as New Yorkers first and Americans second, or Parisiennes first and French second. This tension between global and locally inflected forms lies at the heart of digital culture.

Do these global cultural centers 'just happen'? In several cities around the world, there are incentives to restructure the city to provide more for the cultural industries (21, 15). There is often a conscious effort to encourage the development of a cultural economy. There are many examples worldwide such as Bilbao, Spain (2) with the Guggenheim museum extension and Cleveland, Ohio, USA with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (5). Cleveland is one of a several examples in the U.S., where a "rust-belt" city was transformed. However, there are still some features that are perhaps holding Cleveland back from being a cultural center such as the perception that there is another larger city that would provide a better market for artists (12). In other words, Cleveland is not perceived as "hot place" for the arts. Often as in the case of Manchester (UK), these have developed somewhat consciously, but often chaotically (15.) Cities worldwide are vying for the title of 'cultural center.' As pointed out by Leslie (18), these cities are building museums, conducting market campaigns and other activities in somewhat hazard manner to 'brand' themselves as a Creative City. Leslie (18) states that these top-down actions do not create cultural centers or cultural districts (e.g. Montmartre and Rive Gauche in Paris, SoHo in New York.)

The factors which make a city a cultural transmitter or receiver are based on numerous factors. Some elements that make a city a cultural transmitter are: 1) significant amount of population involved in the cultural economy, 2) an established and well-connected international market for the cultural goods produced; 3) a place where different cultures and ideas vibrantly mix; 4) an urban environment which is encourages interaction; and 5) significant infrastructure (i.e., high speed Internet connections) and 6) a highly skilled labor force that would facilitate the creation of cultural goods.

The Role of Istanbul and its potential to be world cultural center

Istanbul is certainly an important city with a population of over 10 million. This ranks it as one of the handful of mega-cities among them Tokyo, New York, and Mexico City, However, it is not in the ranking of cities that are international centers of culture. Like other cities that greatly influenced world cultures, similar to Vienna and Budapest, it is now a receiver or at least on the margins as being a transmitter of world culture. The fading of its culture and the replacement of culture by that from the West has been occurring since the early 1800's.

The history of Istanbul has been one of accession, decline and rebirth. It has been the center of three major world cultures: Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman. As the capitol of the Roman Empire, the transition was one to the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine Empire which lasted for over a thousand years was slowly chipped away by the Turks until it lost most of its empire and at the end was only a city-state. The population declined due to the diminished status of the city (10). The Ottomans rebuilt the city and transformed it into their capital adorning it with mosques, palaces and other public buildings. The decline of Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire can be traced from the defeat of Istanbul at Vienna. In the early part of the 1800's, the Ottoman Empire started to look to the Europeans for their cultural influence, particularly the French and the Germans (7). The ultimate end of the Empire and of the diminished status of Istanbul as a major world center was the result of the break-up of Empires after WWII (11).

The watershed for Istanbul was the First World War. Since the Ottoman Empire was allied with the Prussians and Austro-Hungarian Empire, they saw their empire being carved up by the French and British. Under the dynamic leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), modern Turkey reemerged and the capital of Turkey was relocated to Ankara. For over almost two thousand years, Istanbul (Constantinople) had been the capital of the Roman, Byzantine Empire and then the Ottoman Empire. It was pushed to the backdrop of global cities, while cities such as New York started to ascend to world culture domination. Istanbul was no longer a cultural or economic center in the world. During the 1980's, Turkey's economy started to open itself to foreign investment. At this time, Istanbul started to increase in population as it drew people from the rural areas to work in the various new industries. By the end of the century, the population of Istanbul was close to 10 million. However, one could not say that it had entered the global cities network or was influential in world culture.

Walker and Taylor (33) state that Istanbul has been relegated to a secondary status due to the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the Cold War:

For some two millennia, Istanbul (in its various guises) has been one of the great cities of the world. It has owed its success to its location on the Bosphorus where it has been a cultural and economic cross-roads both between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and between Europe and Asia. For some two centuries, Istanbul has been in relative decline as world political changes have not been conducive to cosmopolitan centres in traditional empires. First, the rise of the nation-state created homogenous cultural spaces thus demoting cities as cultural melting pots: in the case of Istanbul, its Ottoman inheritance was replaced by a national Turkish state with the capital far away in Ankara. Second, imperial rivalries culminating in the Cold War created

homogenous security spaces thus demoting cities to strategic locations: in the case of Istanbul, Turkey's NATO membership converted much of its hinterland, its Black Sea neighbors and central Asia, into enemy territory. No wonder Istanbul has found it difficult to maintain its historic role as the bridge between East and West.

For many years, Istanbul was on the outskirts of global culture. Istanbul aspires to be a global city, but it not quite there yet. Mango (17) states:

Istanbul aspires to the title of world city. It wants to be classed with New York, London, Paris, Rome. With its 9 million inhabitants at the beginning of the millennium, it has size on its side. It also has history and the monuments to prove it. Its Byzantine walls and churches, Ottoman mosques and palaces, and modern skyscrapers bear witness to its importance since 330 AD, when Constantine the Great chose it as the capital of the Roman empire. Its setting at the junction of Europe and Asia is incomparable. For Turks, 'the pearl of the Bosphorus' is a symbol of their glorious past and the embodiment of their present vigor.

A contrary view was expressed by Orhan Pamuk, one of the few Turkish writers that have international standing. Pamuk (25) states in his recent book, *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, that Istanbul has a collective melancholy based on its diminished world stature, which is unique to Istanbul and which he terms *hüzün*:

..in Istanbul the remains of a glorious past and civilization are everywhere visible. No matter how ill-kept they are, no matter how neglected or hemmed in they are by concrete monstrosities, the great mosques and other monuments of the city, as well as the lesser detritus of empire in every side street and corner-the little arches, fountains and neighborhood mosques inflict heartache on all who live amongst them....But for the city's more sensitive and attuned residents, these ruins are reminders that the present city is so poor and confused that it can never again dream of rising to the same heights of wealth, power and culture.

However, one can not state that its *hüzün* is preventing Istanbul in attempting to transform itself into a major cultural center. There are numerous international festivals and conferences with the express purpose of putting Istanbul into the forefront of the international cultural community. The most effort is the recent nomination of Istanbul as the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010 (32). Istanbul is also attracting the attention of the world cultural community. Newsweek (24) recently termed Istanbul one of the "coolest places in the world" due to the mixing of cultures and the emerging artist community. It is too early to tell if these are indicators that Istanbul is starting to emerge as a member of the global cultural transmitters.

The cultural economy of Istanbul is very robust with a well developed and sophisticated media industry (publishing, television, movies, music etc.) There are numerous venues for original performances (clubs, theaters etc.) It has a world status symphony and opera. The opening of a new Museum of Modern Art is an indication of developing awareness of Turkish modern art. There are numerous firms that are involved in design in fashion, furniture etc. There is a rich culture which mixes elements of Turkish, Middleeastern and European influences together. Istanbul is also the location of several major Turkish universities. There is more tolerance for expression brought about by the reform of Turkish law in conformance with that of the European Union. However, the cultural economy is largely geared toward Turkey. However, this is not altogether true as there are artists and others who are geared toward the International market.

One of the elements of that make a creative center is a lively artistic area. The center of Istanbul culture is Beyoğlu with its main street of Istiklal Caddesi. The area is known for its diversity lined with shops, foreign consulates, churches, a variety of restaurant, cafes. It is also where one will find artists and most of the expatriate community. This area has long been considered the European sector of Istanbul. There is nowhere in Turkey similar to this area or in other places in Istanbul. This area is not the equivalent of creative areas of the past such as Montmartre and Rive Gauche in Paris, SoHo in New York, but shows potential to develop into one.

Another key element that appears to be at the heart of creative centers is their location at key crossroads and their interconnection with other cultures. Istanbul's geographic position is unique in the world as it borders on Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, Ukraine, Russia, and the Central Asian republics (see Figure 1.) This geographic position has been the reason that several world empires have placed their capital in this location. As previously mentioned, during most of the 20th Century these areas were cut-off from Turkey due to the Cold War. There are signs that Istanbul is capitalizing on this "new geography" as there are developing connections to the Balkans, Central Asia, Russia and the Ukraine. Istanbul is at the core of these connections. Another key element that could aid in Istanbul emergence as a world cultural center is Turkey's recent talks for ascension for potential membership into the European Union. These issues are also discussed by Akyuz (1), a former resident of Istanbul now residing in Washington, D.C., USA.

There is certainly the nucleus for Istanbul to become a cultural center, albeit not on the scale of New York, Los Angeles, London or Paris. It could become a secondary cultural center joining such cities as Milan, Berlin, Barcelona and San Francisco. Disconcerting to politicians or those in the economic sector is that there is not a series of investments that can be made by the local and national governments to bring this to fruition. It is the right combination of illusive items such as 'the atmosphere or feeling of a place', a vibrant and interactive intellectual community, aesthetics, and opportunities to interact with the global cultural network that appear to be deciding elements. There is the infrastructure and cultural economy to promote it to the classification of cultural transmitter instead of a receiver. As pointed out by Yardimici (35), Istanbul is a globalized and international city but not a cultural center which is influencing the global cultural network.

Also, cultural centers are developed from the bottom-up and not from the top-down. Istanbul does not have international directors or producers, such as Almodovar for Madrid or Woody Allen for New York that have introduced it to the world. It does have writers such as Orhan Pamuk which has introduced Istanbul to the literary community. The artistic community is not creating the avenues for opening up Istanbul to the world. It does not have the Beatles who made Liverpool and London household names. The only international singer is Tarkan, but it is not known what impact that he is having on bringing Turkey and Istanbul to the forefront of being a global cultural center. Neither does it have a Gaudi or Picasso who internationalized and made Barcelona as cultural center nor a Freda Kalo or Diego Rivera which opened up Mexico and Mexico City to the

world. Why is this? Are the leaders in the artistic community in the background waiting to emerge?

As a resident of Istanbul, one can see the elements that are pushing it toward a greater role in world culture development. Few would disagree that Istanbul is one of the most intriguing and beautiful cities in the world. While physical attributes of a city does not create a cultural center, it greatly contributes to it. It is also very much connected to the global community. Its citizens are aware that Istanbul is part of Turkey, but also firmly connected to other global centers. The Metropolitan Government of Istanbul, like many cities in the developing world, can not concentrate on revitalizing or restructuring because its recent phenomenal population growth means that it must spend most of its money on infrastructure. Therefore, the development of a cultural economy often is not seriously treated. Yet, the future of Istanbul hinges on its ability to integrate and “plug-in” to the global cultural network not just as a participant, but as an influence.

Conclusion

The catalysts that make a city a cultural center are somewhat elusive and complex. While it could be said that cultural urban centers are fostered by municipal and national governments, they are also brought about by chaotic conditions. For example, Prague which languished during the Communist Era is one of the most exciting places in Europe. This is due to a number of factors such as its location, architectural heritage, rich history and a vibrant intellectual and artistic community. Overall, Prague’s cultural environment is dynamic because it was once a repressed society which desired to be interacting with the world and has found its place in the global cultural network again. This is somewhat the nature of cities that emerge as cultural centers as they are not planned, but spontaneous.

The physical environment of cultural centers is what attracts creative people to them. However, it is not the monumental aspect of cities that attract creative people, but those that are on a human scale. It is also not the gentrified historic neighborhoods that attract those that are in the creative arts, but those that are multi-cultural and vibrant. It is also about the networks that artist can establish in an urban area. The city itself also is a backdrop for those in creative media. The establishment of museums, symphonies, art galleries, public sculpture is not what makes up cultural centers. Connectivity to the global network by means of formal and informal means is at the core of cities that are cultural transmitters. This is also connected to the capital influence of a global cultural center in the global market.

Can Istanbul emerge into one of the cities that are cultural centers? The elements are there. As with other cities that form the cultural nodes in the global cultural network, it has the basic building blocks. It is combines both aspects of the East and the West. It has a rich fabric for those involved in the creative arts. Istanbul represents the cultural center of Turkey. There are a growing number of persons in the cultural economy in Istanbul.

There may be a variety of factors that may propel Istanbul into the role as one of the leading cultural centers. At present, one can see some of the beginnings of this development, but it is not clear exactly its direction.

Are there some actions that could transform Istanbul into a global cultural center? It is almost essential that Istanbul looks at means to arrive at this status. The following could be strategies that could accelerate its entry into this status:

1. Revitalization of the central city;
2. Encouragement of cultural entrepreneurship;
3. Development of an outward vision seeing Istanbul as a “city-state” connected to global cultural network;
4. Increased state sponsorship of cultural arts in universities and schools of the arts;
5. Improvements to telecommunication networks and
6. Sponsorship (private or public) of artists having exhibitions, galleries concerts in key international locations (i.e., New York, Paris, London, Milan etc.)

Of course, the above suggested strategies are not complete. There needs to further study on this matter. Istanbul is evolving and reacting to the recent opportunities. Whether it will emerge as one of several key global cultural centers is still not clear as it depends on several factors which are uncertain such as Turkey’s entry into the European Union. However, given Istanbul’s past history of decline and rebirth and the present dynamic forces working within and outside Istanbul, the possibility of its reemergence as a significant global cultural force seems more likely than unlikely.

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Table 1: 2003 World Urban Population Rankings (22)

Rank	Urbanized Population	Urban area/City	Country
1	34,997,269	Tokyo	Japan
2	18,660,221	Mexico City	Mexico
3	18,252,339	New York 3	USA
4	17,857,001	Sao Paulo	Brazil
5	17,431,305	Mumbai (Bombay)	India
6	14,145,956	Delhi	India
7	13,805,691	Calcutta	India
8	13,047,115	Buenos Aires	Argentina
9	12,759,367	Shanghai	China
10	12,295,516	Jakarta	Indonesia
11	12,018,068	Los Angeles	USA
12	11,560,211	Dhaka	Bangladesh
13	11,243,853	Osaka-Kobe	Japan
14	11,214,126	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil
15	11,078,298	Karachi	Pakistan
16	10,847,827	Beijing	China
17	10,834,495	Cairo	Egypt
18	10,468,743	Moscow	Russian Federation
19	10,352,249	Metro Manila	Philippines
20	10,103,459	Lagos	Nigeria
21	9,794,337	Paris	France
22	9,713,757	Seoul	South Korea
23	9,371,163	Istanbul	Turkey
24	9,271,376	Tianjin	China
25	8,567,571	Chicago	USA
26	7,898,778	Lima	Peru
27	7,619,014	London	United Kingdom
28	7,289,646	Santa Fe/Bogata	Colombia
29	7,190,000	Tehran	Iran
30	7,049,175	Hong Kong	China, Hong Kong SAR

Note: Alpha cites are noted in **bold print**; Frankfurt's rank is 538 and Milan is 61 in world urban population. Istanbul's population rank is noted as number 23. However, the population of Istanbul may be from 10 to 15 million due the large amount of unreported persons.

Figure 1: Location of Istanbul in Eurasia

