

THE ROLE OF IMAGE IN CREATING THE POST-SOCIALIST CITY (CASE STUDY OF KAZAN, TATARSTAN)

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ABSTRACT: The paper contributes to our understanding of the role of urban imagery in making the post-socialist city. The literature on urban transition pays modest attention to the politics of urban development and remains largely descriptive (Feldman 2000; Gel'man 2002). The use of urban regime or growth coalition frameworks (Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989) can fill some theoretical gaps but these frameworks are too criticised as “empiricist and localist” (Ward 1996). To avoid these limitations the research on urban development in post-Socialist cities should become better connected with modern debates on Neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore 2002), urban governance (Swyngedouw et al 2003a) and urban imagery (Massey 2007). The paper uses the resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque in Kazan Kremlin (1996-2005) as a case study of the emerging in Kazan model of urban governance which is characterised by the dominance of the authorities and the use of powerful imagery to achieve political mobilisation and financial support.

KEYWORDS: urban governance, urban development projects, urban imagery, Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia, post-socialist city, growth machine, urban regime, Kul-Sharif Mosque.

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper contributes to our understanding of the role of urban imagery in creating the post-socialist city. The post-Socialist urban literature pays modest attention to the politics of urban development and remains largely descriptive (Feldman 2000; Gel'man 2002). The use of urban regime or growth coalition frameworks (Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989) can fill some theoretical gaps but these frameworks are criticised as well as “empiricist and localist” (Ward 1996). To avoid these limitations the research on urban development in post-Socialist cities should become better connected with modern debates on Neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore 2002), urban governance (Swyngedouw et al 2003a) and urban imagery (Massey 2007).

This paper seeks to analyse the role of the image of the city in the formation of local development regimes in one of the Russia's regional capitals by exploring the question as to how urban imagery is used to promote development projects and legitimise political order and governance practices. Kazan is the capital of Tatarstan Republic and a large industrial, commercial and scientific centre located in the centre of the western part of Russia, about 800 km east of Moscow. The case study of Kazan shows that the authorities use themes of nationalism, religion, regional identity to promote urban development as well as to legitimise own power. The recent transformation of the image, physical structure and governance of Kazan provoke numerous questions about the political choices and governance mechanisms behind specific development schemes and projects.

2. URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE

Literature on urban development in post-socialist cities often pays little attention to the governing mechanisms behind urban development projects. The transformations of urban space are often presented as theoretically unproblematic, “natural” consequences of transition to a market economy and democracy. The pre-existing institutions, governing practices, uses of urban space are often seen as “legacies” that slow the progress in the “right” direction down (French, 1995). Although it has been acknowledged that cities are important for the very process of “transition” (Kostinskiy 2001, p. 451; Harloe 1996, p. 3), little research has been done to explore possible connections between urban governance, urban space and development programmes and projects and wider socio-economic transformations.

The use of urban regime type of frameworks (Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989) can fill some theoretical gaps in research on urban governance in post-Socialist cities and shed light on the emerging schemes of public-private cooperation and political coalitions that drive the development process. According to Harvey (1989) “urban governance” means much more than urban “government”, because the real power lies “within a broader coalition of forces within which urban government and administration have only a facilitative and coordinating role to play. The power to organise space derives from a whole complex of forces mobilised by diverse social agents” (Harvey 1989, p. 6). The public sector has become increasingly dependent on the private sector involvement in urban development projects. The institutional arrangements which allow actors to work together under conditions of ‘limited and dispersed authority’ and achieve publicly significant results have become known as urban regimes (Stone 1989, p. 9). According to Logan and Molotch (1987) progrowth forces build a coalition that makes a city a “growth machine”, which is defined by the authors as “an apparatus of interlocking progrowth associations and governmental units” (pp. 32-33). To some extent this depicts the situation in post-Socialist cities. At the same time, the theoretical transfer of urban regime theory remains a debatable question. Urban regime theory has been criticised as “empiricist and localist” (Ward 1996, p. 428), as having weak explanatory power (Davies 2002, p. 13) and having little applicability beyond the US-context (Wood 2004, p. 2103).

To avoid these limitations the research on urban development in post-Socialist cities should become better connected with modern debates on Neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore 2002), urban governance (Swyngedouw et al 2003a). The transition to the Neoliberal city should not be seen as a linear process, rather as “a contested, trial and error searching process in which Neoliberal strategies are being mobilised in place specific forms and combinations” (Brenner and Theodore 2002, p. 375). Swyngedouw and Moulaert (2003) suggest that urban development projects play a more important role than a mere instrumental one in attracting investment and conceptualised urban development project as a laboratory and testing site of urban governance. There is a growing literature that examines the role of urban development projects in the formation of urban governance models. Large-scale urban development projects (UDPs) have become a sort of new urban policy that actively produces, enacts, embodies, and shapes the new political and economic regimes that are operative at the local, regional, national and global scales. They are the material expression of a developmental logic that views mega-projects and place marketing as major leverages for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital. Urban projects of this kind are, therefore, neither mere result or response, nor the consequence of political and economic change enacted elsewhere. On the contrary, we argue that such UDPs are the very catalysts of urban and political change; UDPs incorporate processes that are felt locally, but regionally, nationally, and internationally as well (Swyngedouw et al 2003, pp. 2-3).

Here urban development projects are analysed in the light of globalisation process and specifically within the interaction of the global and the local (“glocal”). Urban development projects play an important role in the processes of social, economic and political restructuring are used as “the lens through which we can begin to excavate the myriad processes of socio-spatial change that have reshaped ... the co-ordinates of everyday life” (Swyngedouw et al 2003a, p.11). Urban development projects are not only the final result or product of governance, they are the process through which governance is performed and patterns of power are constructed. Actors involved in urban development project through them exercise the governing power. This discussion provokes further questions about the role of the image in local development regimes and governing mechanisms.

3. THE ROLE OF THE IMAGE OF THE CITY IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

3.1 City Image and Local Identity Construction

The promoters of large urban development projects have always used powerful imagery to promote urban growth and reinforce own positions of power (Sudjic 2006). Commonly this imagery is built upon the rhetoric of nationalism Graney (2007; 2009); statehood revival (Anacker 2004; Šir 2008) economic power (Pagonis and Thornley 2000). According to Philo and Kearns (1993) history is implicated in selling places in three different ways: 1) as a source of pride and inspiration for the present; 2) through the use of ‘heroic’ imagery surrounding specific historical processes as a lever for money making and persuasion in the present; 3) through adoption of all manner of historical references, particularly architectural references (p. 6).

3.2 City Image and City Marketing

The literature on city marketing and “selling places” treats image as instrumental to the purposes of local economic development (Short et al 1993). Architecture helps to advertise urban development projects and promote speculative investment (Crilley 1993, p. 231). Smyth (1994) considers the preparation of a marketing strategy for a building project, a development area or the whole city as isomorphic processes (p. 2). The literature on city marketing conceptualises the image as a part of re-branding and re-packaging of places through “the promotion of new urban images, of new lifestyles and of new ‘city myths’” (Goodwin 1993, p. 149). City marketing, city branding and selling the city techniques can be seen as tools of entrepreneurial urban governance together are informed by the urban competitiveness logic (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005).

3.3 City Image and Political Legitimacy

The production of imagery is deeply embedded into the socio-economic relations and economic production, investment and culture (Harvey, 1990). Apart from the economic logic behind the production and use of a new image of the city described in city marketing literature, there is also a strong social power logic as place promotion activities may be “designed to convince local people, many of whom will be disadvantaged and potentially disaffected, that they are important cogs in a successful community and that all sorts of ‘good things’ are really being done on their behalf” (Philo and Kearns 1993, p. 3). Lovering (2007) argues that the ‘performative turn’ in urban governance has been a result of the diminishing capacity of urban governance actors to deliver qualitative change in economic growth and attempts to “present themselves as if there is something that they can actually be seen to achieve” (Lovering 2007, p. 360). The following sections will attempt to demonstrate how these three aspects of the image play out in the project of the Kul-Sharif Mosque resurrection.

4. CASE STUDY: THE RESURRECTION OF THE KUL-SHARIF MOSQUE IN KAZAN KREMLIN (1996-2005).

During the heydays of the Tatarstani sovereignty (1990-1999), Kazan was positioned as the “capital city of the Republic of Tatarstan”. The Kul-Sharif Mosque was resurrected in the Kazan Kremlin (1996-2005) as the most important symbol of Tatarstani statehood. The project required nine years to be finished and millions of dollars of construction costs. The rest of the section will discuss the role of the Mosque in three areas: 1) local identity construction; 2) city marketing / economic development; 3) political legitimacy.

4.1 Local Identity Construction

In the 1990s in Tatarstan the aspirations for sovereignty from Russia and growing national and religious awareness required relevant material symbols of admiration and worship. Khalitov (1997) argued that Kul-Sharif was not just a mosque, and not even the main mosque of Kazan and the state. It is the new symbol of Kazan and Tatarstan, the centre of attraction of the entire Tatar Diaspora (p. 243). Kul-Sharif Mosque played a significant role in substantiating the Tatarstani statehood with national and cultural identity. The resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque was an interesting example of inventing heritage as a part of a wider process of constructing a new Tatar identity. The Kazan Kremlin as the historic core of the city became the site of exploration of the city’s historical roots and at the same time the place that witnessed the

construction of a new history. The Kazan Kremlin was always perceived as a centre of Tatarstani statehood. A senior research fellow in the Tatarstan Republic Academy of Science revealed during interview that the Kremlin had always been a symbol of the alien power because of the Russian garrison and the Governor's palace. That is why it was so important to demonstrate that the Tatarstani authorities had the political power and economic strength to build such an ambitious project as the Mosque located right in the Kremlin. The symbol of the Tatarstani statehood revival re-emerged exactly where the statehood was lost (Interview, 2007).

4.2 City Marketing / Economic Development

Although the empirical study have not revealed any direct links between the resurrection of the Mosque and strengthening the positions of Tatarstan on the market, the Tatarstani diplomacy skilfully have used the regional ethnic and cultural characteristics to promote the foreign trade and international relations. As a special advisor to the president of Tatarstan Republic has stated during interview

We produce a lot of goods but they will be impossible to sell in the UK. That is why we are looking at the Asian and Turkic markets... The Tatar language helps to work on those markets. It is easier for us to work with the Muslims because they understand us better. But we use the Orthodox Christianity as well when visiting Greece for instance - we say here are our Christian traditions, when dealing with an Islamic country – here are our Muslim traditions (Interview, 2007).

Additionally the image of the Mosque became publicised and reproduced in all promotional materials about Tatarstan and Kazan. The Investment Guide to Kazan called “Kazan – the third capital of Russia” describes the Mosque as “magnificent” and the “biggest in Europe”. According to the guide, the Mosque was built as “a symbol of revival of the national and religious traditions of the Tatar people and their desire to have equal relationship with other peoples” (Merya Kazani 2007). The Mosque was also mentioned the investment guide for the Tatarstan Republic along with other ‘grand projects’ (Ministerstvo Torgovli 2007). These guides are distributed at investment forums and to the foreign businessmen visiting Kazan.

4.3 Political Legitimacy

The project of the Mosque resurrection has helped the authorities to refine the format of the relationship with the religious organisations. The project has demonstrated that the political authorities of Tatarstan took the lead and made all the significant decision about the destiny of the Mosque, it also showed that in Tatarstan the Muslim clergy promised their loyalty to the authorities in exchange of economic support.

A special Kul-Sharif Mosque Fund was established by the government to accumulate donations and manage the construction process. Although no official information is available on the cost of construction and sources of funding, the authorities maintained that voluntary donations were the only source of funding. The main bulk of the required funding came from large industries that played the main role in supporting the construction. The Tatarstani president Shaimiev explained the origin of funding as follows (cited in Yakupov 2006):

The oil-industry workers have helped to construct the Mosque. Although Islamic states offered money to build the Mosque, we said that the Mosque was significant for the republic and would be built by ourselves. We did a God pleasing thing when we decided to do so... It happened that there was a good harvest that year. I called together the heads of district administrations and told them: God sent us rain in time and we have collected two extra centners of grain from a hectare, which we otherwise would have not collected” Then, according to Yakoupov, meetings were held in villages where people voluntary decided to transfer surplus grain as a donation to the Kul Sharif Fund (2006, p. 181).

Table 1 below summarises the findings of 34 interviews conducted in 2007-2008 in Kazan during several field trips as part of a PhD project. The table shows different aspects of the Kul-Sharif Mosque image were perceived / used by different actors in Kazan.

Table 1. The perception of the Kul-Sharif Mosque by different actors (compiled by the author).

Actors	The role of the Kul-Sharif Mosque as perceived by different actors		
	Regional Identity Construction	City Marketing and Economic Development	Securing Political Legitimacy
The authorities of Tatarstan Republic the City of Kazan	Emphasises ethnic and religions differences between Tatarstan and Russia. Helps to achieve political mobilisation in front of the Russian authorities.	Helps to make the republic and the city recognisable for foreign investors.	Symbolises the revival of the Tatarstani state Helps to position Tatarstan as a semi-independent region Helps to strengthen the power positions of the regional elites domestically.
Domestic Businesses		Helps to make the city recognisable for foreign investors Strengthens regional sovereignty and helps to retain more economic control at the regional level.	Strengthens links between the authorities and businesses. Facilitates access to the authorities.
Muslim clergy	Helps to strengthen the Islamic component in the local identity and recruit more supporters.	Positions the city on the global map as the northern centre of Islam and may create opportunities for foreign aid	Facilitates access to the authorities. Helps to receive support and protection from the authorities.
Voters	Helps to “heal the scars” of forced Russification and Christianisation Helps to build national pride		Helps the voters to recognise the political regime as “legitimate”.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study of the resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque in Kazan Kremlin (1996-2005) has illustrated the role of the powerful urban imagery in constructing new urban governing regimes and practices. In the 1990s the aspirations for sovereignty from Russia and growing national and religious awareness required the creation of recognisable urban landscapes and symbols. The Mosque was ideal for this purpose because the Tatarstani statehood had always been linked to Islam. The Mosque has satisfied the expectations of the Tatar part of the population by offering the most vivid representation of the Tatarstani statehood revival and the nation’s spiritual renaissance. The Mosque worked as “cultural packaging” of the ideas of sovereignty that helped to communicate the message of Tatarstan’s status of a semi-sovereign republic domestically, to the Russian authorities and beyond in the most effective, visually recognisable and long lasting way.

The state supported the project using the state controlled industries as financial donors. A *quid pro quo* model of relationship formed between large industries and the authorities where the businesses supported various projects initiated by the authorities and in exchange received protection from competition, access to credit and other benefits. Both the state and the industries benefited from Tatarstan’s special fiscal arrangements with Russia’s central authorities achieved as a result of Tatarstani sovereignty.

The Mosque was not a mere ‘product’ but as an important creative element of the sovereignty project. It did not simply show the return to ‘the cultural roots’ but gave the federal government in Moscow a clear message that Tatarstan was different from the rest of Russia and was looking for more independence. The Mosque was called to demonstrate to the federal centre the capacity of the Tatars to mobilise and see themselves as a nation with symbolic attributes of a nation including monumental art and architecture.

The paper has demonstrated that the boundaries between commercial, symbolic and political rationale for urban development projects are becoming blurred which forms a new cultural and political

landscape as well as a new political economy of urban space. This paper argues that large urban development projects like the resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque in Kazan Kremlin (1996-2005) are indeed laboratories of urban governance where political actors work out the schemes of cooperation and new urban forms, images and governing mechanisms are produced through a trial and error process.

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