

Modernity Through Heritage: Istanbul's Heritage Revival

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Heritage tourism has become an important factor to attract visitors around the globe. In the last decade, the Turkish government has actively used the country's cultural heritage for tourism development. As Turkey's cultural and economic center and with its unique geographical location between Europe and Asia, Istanbul is a special focus in the approach to revitalize the city's tourist potential through heritage.

The city's far reaching past as capital of two empires is revived with the restoration and/or reconstruction of Ottoman architecture as well as Byzantine remains. The renewal projects often come along with fundamental changes in the urban fabric, with the demolition of vernacular architecture and the displacement of former residents. At the same time, large-scale development projects such as the country's biggest mosque, the world's largest airport, or a canal parallel to the Bosphorus Straits, stimulate the city's modernization and underline Istanbul's competitiveness on an international scale. With historical reconstructions, such as the Ottoman military barracks in Taksim Square and several gated community projects in historical appearance, heritage tourism and urban development are effectively combined to promote Istanbul as a global metropolis.

In the paper I will reflect on how heritage tourism and its (re)created version(s) of the past as well as the intensive modernization projects in recent years change the materiality in Istanbul's cityscape. The presentation will shed light on how residents, experts, and tourists connect to these modifications in the urban environment. Heritage promotion does not oppose Istanbul's modernization but is actively used to improve the urban environment. The paper is based on fifteen months of ethnographic research conducted between July 2012 and October 2013.