

## Constructing and branding Astana: Promoting the heritage of the new capital of Kazakhstan

Richard W. Hallett, Ph.D.  
 Russell Zanca, Ph.D.  
 Northeastern Illinois University

### Abstract

This paper addresses how the official tourism website of Kazakhstan, VisitKazakhstan.kz, linguistically and socially constructs a place identity for its current capital, Astana. Beginning with Fürsich and Robins' (2004:148) claim that tourism is a "textual mechanism rich in symbols, imagery, and rhetoric that can be analyzed with regard to identity work", this presentation employs multimodal critical discourse analysis to show how the website, operating as a grand narrative, constructs an identity for the city of Astana, which was awarded the UNESCO Cities for Peace Prize in 1999.

In the postmodern view of identity as a social construct, travel and tourism can be seen as one way to participate in a "social relationship" (MacCannell 1999:203). Tourism studies are valuable for they may illuminate "in concrete detail the links between power and knowledge, the generation of images of the Other, the creation of 'natives' and 'authenticity,' the consumption of images, and so on" (Crick 1989:329-330). Following the dissolution of the USSR, Astana became the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1997. The government has since concomitantly promoted its "new heritage" and branded the city (See Florek 2011, Paganoni 2015) by emphasizing the city's new constructions, e.g.

- (1) A new administrative center of Astana erected on the left bank of the Ishim River is full of architectural sights and despite its youth, still attracts tourists. (<http://visitkazakhstan.kz/en/guide/places/15/0/>, accessed May 21, 2015)
- (2) The eighth wonder of the world, as some people already called this building... Pyramid of peace and concord is a sort of apotheosis of tolerance idea, the monument of Kazakhstani people unity and their aspiration to harmony and humanitarian values. (<http://visitkazakhstan.kz/en/guide/places/15/0/>, accessed May 21, 2015)

Thus the official tourism website Astana constructs and brands Astana through its relatively-new heritage.