

THE ROLE OF AIRPORT BRANDING IN THE PROMOTING OF CITIES IN THE WORLD URBAN SYSTEM: ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES.

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AT A GLANCE

Airports, in addition to fulfilling aeronautical functions (landings, take-offs) and contributing to the socio-territorial dynamization of the areas where they are located, play an essential role in the constitution, consolidation and maintenance of world cities, as they are symbolic facilities, linked to recent cultural dynamics in a context of New Economy and cognitive-cultural capitalism (Scott, 2014).

According to these theories, the typically physical mechanisms of the industrial city are replaced by others of an intangible nature, such as knowledge, innovation, and creativity, which are considered the new driving forces of territorial development in the post-industrial city. Thus, the extreme competitiveness that exists between the main cities of the world for acquiring the qualification of “global” means that they not only focus on attracting a multiplicity of economic flows, but also require particular forms of cultural capital (symbols, images) that emphasize their identity, distinction, modernity and avant-garde.

This more immaterial perspective is emphasized in this poster analysing the change of conception in their architectural design. Auteur architecture, known as starchitecture, has become one of the main mechanisms used in cities to compete globally, and airports, in particular, are beginning to consolidate as new laboratories where this type of action can be captured, since they are venues traveled by millions of users. Until the mid-eighties, they were for the most part mere functional transit zones without architectural entity, utilitarian structures devoid of any special aesthetic value. However, since then, these neuralgic points of air transport have emerged as prestigious experimental laboratories of avant-garde architecture, where unique materials, very modern forms of complex architectural solution and eclectic inspirations become the main elements so that «the artistic surpasses the functional».

Along with the change of conception in their architectural design, this more immaterial perspective will focus on the growing role of leisure-consumption activities that are developed in these airports, in addition to the attempts to project territorial identities in a world context where homogenization patterns printed by globalization are generalized.

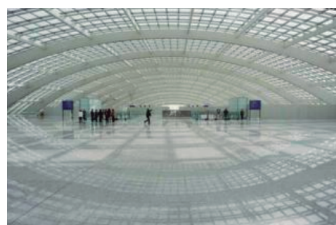
It is concluded that, in the face of those anthropological conceptions that define airports as “not places”, they can be referred to as “places of Globalization”, as that are defined, or are at least heavily influenced, by prevailing vectors in current society such as leisure, consumption and global mobility.

OBJETIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Through the analysis of different Architecture Studies and a photographic compendium (own and from the Internet), this poster aims to analyse how the image, identity or "brand" of the most successful airports contribute to promoting the symbolic value of cities and, therefore consequently, to position them on the global map.

AVANT-GARDE ARCHITECTURE AND MORPHOLOGICAL CHANGES IN AIRPORTS

Auteur architecture, known as starchitecture, has become one of the main mechanisms used in cities to emphasise their identity and cosmopolitanism and to compete globally (Ponzini & Nastasi 2016). Skyscrapers, museums, hotels and auditoriums are good examples. In this list, airports develop a key role, since their floors are walked upon by millions of users every year. Thus, the functional and transit areas, without aesthetic qualities in the past, are now replaced by prestigious “laboratories” of avant-garde architecture, where unique materials, ultramodern forms of complex architectural solutions and eclectic inspirations have become the main elements for artistic qualities to exceed the functional (Alailly-Mattar et al 2020). It may be highlighted the undulating roofs in Beijing-Capital (work by Foster), Shanghai-Pudong (Rogers), Osaka-Kansai (Piano), Beijing-Daxing (starfish-shaped by Hadid) or Tocumen-Panama (alien spaceship-shaped by Foster); the glass walls in London-Heathrow (Rogers), HongKong-ChekLapKok (Foster) or Dubai International (Andréu). In addition, the use of unique materials such as bamboo on the roof of the T4 at AS Madrid-Barajas (Rogers) or fiberglass Teflon at Denver International (Bradburn).



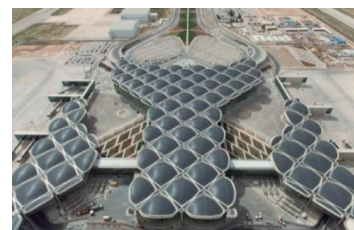
LEISURE AND CONSUMER PRACTICES IN AIRPORTS

The factor of representation and image is also developed in ancillary activities of the airports. Due to development of activities related to leisure and consumption, trade becomes a pretext and purpose for the leisure time of passengers. It is also not surprising, therefore, that “global brands” considered icons of cosmopolitanism and distinction, are observed widely in many airports around the world, operating as privileged shopping centers (air-malls) in the city (Castillo et al 2018). Additionally, other recreational equipment, with clear influence from the “entertainment economy” (Stevens 2007) shows the recent transformation that airports are experiencing, such as luxurious shopping centres (Dubai Airport); theaters and cinemas (Singapore Airport); saunas, spas and gyms (Doha Airport); swimming pools (Singapore Airport and Munich Airport); and museums and art galleries (Amsterdam-Schiphol), among others.



HOMOGENIZATION PATTERNS VS TERRITORIAL IDENTITIES IN AIRPORTS

The duality established in world cities between homogenization and singularization is also observed in airports since there is a phenomenon of particularization or “exaltation of the specificity of the place”, both inside and outside the infrastructure, highlighting the global-local dualism present in these facilities (Leconte 2020). Examples of this can be found in airport buildings, which allows the passenger to identify the building with the place, region or country where it is located: the Rocky Mountains served as inspiration for the shape given to the teflon-coated fiberglass cover of the passenger terminal at Denver Airport; the Korean culture is displayed with a design inspired by a traditional Korean home in Incheon Airport; the roof of the Beijing Airport recalls the morphology of a dragon in allusion to one of the greatest emblems of Chinese culture; the plan of the new Mexico City Airport, with the form of an “X”, refers to the word Mexico; and the recently reopened Amman Airport imitates the “geometries of Arab culture”. Local identity is also staged in areas that emphasize fun, leisure and relaxation, and that have revolutionized the “anodyne” waiting room: slot machines are located in Las Vegas-McCarran to continue experiencing the atmosphere of the city’s casinos; the Auckland Airport Arrivals Hall welcomes international passengers in an atmosphere recreated in “Middle Earth”; and in Singapore-Changi, several gardens allow one to meet the fauna and flora of their respective local regions without leaving the enclosure.



CONCLUSSIONS

At present, airports have acquired symbolic and experiential connotations (representative nature, brand, and image) that have become important citymarketing strategies that help to promote the international projection of cities; something that is of great interest in the new current context of urban competitiveness, where cultural dynamics, linked to leisure-consumption, typical of globalization, acquire great prominence. This symbolic perspective, analysed in the above three perspectives, allows to conclude that airports are not only vectors of contemporary mobility. Instead, and against those anthropological conceptions that define them as “not places”, they can be referred to as “places of Globalization”, so they are defined, or are at least heavily influenced, by prevailing vectors in current society such as leisure, consumption and global mobility.

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