

# Tool or Goal?

## *Istanbul 2010: European Capital of Culture*

With a year of visual arts, music, film, documentary & animation, literature, performing & traditional arts, urban projects & programmes, and an array of educational initiatives, what the citizens of Istanbul make of their city's role as European Capital of Culture will take more than 12 months to digest. The role is one that comes with a unique set of politics and whether inside or outside of the 'Agency', the geo-political position of Turkey's 'World City' has certainly gained international interest.

text GÖKSEN BURGA  
photos STEFAN PANGRITZ

When it comes to Istanbul, starting with clichés is both necessary and risky. Take the best known ones: The city conjoins two continents, the cultural bridge between Europe and Asia, and the capitals of empires... These are characteristics and colours of a city, already solidified through the ages by different civilisations. So the question is, what can the governors and inhabitants add to its value in contemporary conditions and opportunities? Istanbul now has an opportunity to address these questions in becoming the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) in 2010. And another question comes to mind: Is the ECOC a tool or a goal for Istanbul? If it is a tool, what will Istanbul use it for or if it is a goal in itself, what will be the results?

As holder of the 'European Capital of Culture', Istanbul is set to re-examine its value, to upgrade its position in the global cultural network, to gain new policies and production mechanisms for art and culture, to develop new management methods and to improve the cultural relations with Europe and rest of the world. It all started when a group of civil society volunteers established a 'Civil Initiative' in 2000. The European Commission pointed out the role of civil initiative in their choice of

Istanbul as ECOC, since it has been a serious problem that the governmental institutions could not always meet the creative potential of civil enterprises. The effort to move from a fragmented management system - where the institutions reject creating partnerships with other institutions - to a co-operational management model is intended to help get projects created and realised in international professional platforms. Indeed, my personal belief is that Istanbul 2010, with its 'facilitator' character, could play an important role in the public sphere, in the inhabitants' ideas of their city, if it can be used effectively as a 'tool' for cultural transformation.

### A Dual Capital

On a different but very important note, the ECOC, both in local and global areas, has started to be understood as a new institution, in other terms: 'the Agency' and there became a duality of 'Istanbul 2010' as the Agency on one side and 'Capital of Culture' as the title on the other. It has been a situation expressively avoided by the Civil Initiative since the beginning. The 2010 agency does not mean to fill an institutional gap because the city is not in the need for a new institution for cultural management or urban implementations. The project ideas have been

An evening scene in front of the Blue Mosque





# Sense of Urgency

## *Istanbul: A State of Art*

Whether defined as a ‘World City’, waiting in the wings for EU membership, or providing that rope bridge between the creeping interests of the West, Istanbul is proving a rich source for cultural storytellers. With the last edition of its contemporary art biennial guided by political references, in 2010 the city begins its year as the European Cultural Capital. What that means to the vested interests and promoters might be clear on a glib level, but how will this latter event impact on the city and its citizens?

text BRAD FOX

Istanbul, taking a fresh breath?  
Photos: Stefan Pangritz

talked through, solution alternatives have been sought and many projects were realised for years in this city. If the problem is insufficient results, then it could be said that solution is not a new institution but a new management structure. At the beginning, Istanbul 2010 aimed to realise a structure relying on common mind, having a strong interaction network, bringing public and civil together and making them solution partners, in other words to acknowledge that the city and the problem is ours. So the ECOC programme could be a motive for creating a methodology, gaining an experience and leading to methodical/intellectual development.

The New Year is about to be start and Istanbul will take place in the front rows of culture and art's arenas. But still there is ambiguity: ECOC might be a tool to evoke and stimulate the city's potential and push different partners to raise the city's standards or it might aim to realise itself as an institution and achieve to carry out planned projects.

[www.istanbul2010.org](http://www.istanbul2010.org)

