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**A World-Class city in the middle of the Steppe:  
Place marketing and the construction of an image of place in Astana,  
Kazakhstan**

**Tatiana Skok Hobbs  
Masters Thesis  
Department of Communication  
University of Ottawa  
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I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Mark Lowes for his guidance and constant reminders not to be precious.

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You just call out my name  
And you know wherever I am  
I'll come running to see you again  
Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall  
All you have to do is call  
And I'll be there  
You've got a friend

## Abstract

Place marketing has become one of the most popular methods used by urban elites and civic boosters to revitalize and re-image cities in order to project a world-class city image. However, case studies examined in the literature have primarily focused upon Western cities and thus conclusions with respect to place marketing's mechanisms and effects are limited. This thesis seeks to broaden the application of place marketing as a concept by using Astana, Kazakhstan as a case study. The thesis focuses upon evaluating place marketing as a concept to determine whether the construction and projection of a world-class city image of place through spectacular developments and entertainment facilities is truly a global practice. The research indicates that Astana is following the place marketing model seen in case studies of Western cities, especially with respect to the construction and projection of a world-class city image.

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The purpose of this thesis is to see whether urban communication and place marketing literature has application to the case of Astana, Kazakhstan (refer to Appendix A), widely considered to be an emerging world-class city. Thus, this thesis is an attempt to ascertain whether the phenomenon of constructing and projecting a world-class city image through the physical landscape and promotional discourse exists outside of a Western frame of reference. This thesis also seeks to determine whether there is a difference between the revitalization and re-imaging process that exists in case studies of Western cities and the complete construction of a physical landscape and image of place which is apparent in Astana.

Researchers within the field of urban communication studying place marketing have almost exclusively focused upon Western cities and thus very little of the literature addresses cities in other parts of the world, such as Asia, Africa, Russia or Central Asia. This Western frame of reference is further emphasized as many academics in the field of urban communication and place marketing approach the topic from a neo-Marxist perspective, which addresses the effects of capitalism upon the process of urbanization. Thus, the case study of Astana, Kazakhstan is significant because it does not follow the Western model with respect to its political economy or culture, yet it appears that many of the characteristics and effects of place marketing remain present in Astana.

The majority of case studies in the literature reviewed for this thesis speak to cities that have undergone or are currently undergoing re-imaging and revitalization campaigns. The application of the literature to Astana also addresses this gap in the literature, as Astana is a new city, therefore it is not being revitalized, but built from the ground up, especially with respect to the left bank.

There are several theoretical implications that are of interest to this thesis. The first of these is related to whether the classification of a postmodern society that emphasizes the aesthetic realm can be applied to places that do not share a common political, economic, cultural and social history. Can Astana be classified as a postmodern city despite the differences between it and Western cities in Great Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia? The postmodern classification of cities leads to the second theoretical ramification of the thesis, which speaks to how spaces are produced. In essence the thesis seeks to determine whether the built environment of cities is produced with an emphasis upon images, signs and symbols outside of the West through the use of Astana as a case study. The third theoretical implication and the central proposition of this thesis is whether place marketing and the revitalization and re-imagining of the built environment in order to remain competitive and attract investment is a global phenomenon and can therefore be applied to Astana. If place marketing is found to exist in Astana than further case studies of non-Western cities are warranted in order to demonstrate the global nature of urban communication and the ability to read the physical landscape as a text.

The literature related to this thesis focuses upon the concepts of: (a) postmodernism, (b) the production of space, (c) the urban landscape as an ideology, (d) the image of a world-class city, and (e) the role of key actors in the production of the built environment. With respect to the place marketing literature, the concept of neoliberalism is examined and applied to the case of Astana. The specifics of entrepreneurial urban governance as outlined by Harvey (1989*b*), as well as the concept of gentrification and the often written and studied image reality gap that can emerge due

to place marketing as a practice are dissected and applied to Astana. This is done in order to determine whether the practice of place marketing as outlined in numerous case studies of Western cities expresses itself in the same form in Astana – a non-Western city.

This thesis does not seek to provide a semiotic analysis of Astana's built environment with respect to the "architectonic significance" (Preziosi, 1979, p.61) of the individual structures within the city. However, the thesis will provide definitions for sign, symbol and image, as the thesis will attempt to determine whether the structures that have been constructed and are being constructed in Astana can be considered spectacular in nature and whether they are similar to the structures built in case studies of Western cities that have pursued place marketing campaigns in the hopes of projecting a world-class city image to both a local and global audience. In addition, the thesis is not attempting to comment upon or discover whether a cult of personality exists in Astana specifically or Kazakhstan in general. The examination of the key public figures and actors with respect to the construction of the built environment is done to ascertain whether there is a similarity with case studies of Western cities with respect to how the built environment is produced and constructed by a few urban elite.

The expectation of this thesis is to find that place marketing does exist in Astana despite the differences in history between it and other Western urban spaces. This was expected as in Astana there was a need to construct and project the image of a world-class city in order to attract investment not only in the physical landscape of the city, but in the country of Kazakhstan as a whole. Newly independent Kazakhstan had to create a name for itself in order to survive and become competitive on the international stage and in the newly globalized economy. The central research question of this thesis and one to

keep in mind through the reading is: “Can urban communication and place marketing literature be applied to case studies outside of a Western frame of reference?”

## Chapter 1:

### *Literature Review*

Urban communication is a field of study that examines culturally produced images, landscapes and promotional discourses in order to identify the economic, political and social implications of place marketing. This thesis examines place marketing as a distinct *practice*, drawing on scholarly literature that focuses primarily on the concepts of ideology, world-class cities, spectacle, and the commodification and political economy of place, which are all situated within a postmodern time frame.

### *Postmodernism*

Postmodernism is wide ranging in its theoretical scope, therefore for the purposes of this thesis postmodernist theory is limited to three areas of interest: (a) consumption of objects, rather than the production of objects, (b) media imagery, and (c) new communication technologies. For the purposes of this thesis postmodernism will be defined as focusing upon the themes of diversity, peace, the environment; moving away from traditional monolithic political structures and social controls, fostering “a new aesthetic” (Witheyford & Gruneau, 1993). This new aesthetic implies that rather than focusing upon the discursive aspects of culture, best summarized as words, the figural or the images associated with culture become central – a much more sensuous experience.

In a broad sense, the political shift that characterizes the emergence of postmodernism is rooted in the end of the industrial era that occurred in the early 1970s and the changes stimulated by neoliberal economic policies, which encouraged diversity with respect to modes of accumulation and consumption, as well as social policy.

Political theorist Jameson (1984) speaks of postmodernism as it relates to architecture - the built form and aesthetic production within the urban space. Aesthetic production at its most basic level is the creation of objects. However, the objects that will be focused upon in this thesis are architectural structures located on the urban landscape. In this formulation these architectural structures appeal primarily to the senses and trigger an emotional response. Consequently the focus ceases to be upon the functionality of the built environment and shifts towards the image projection capability of the built environment and its appeal to the viewer. Architectural objects of postmodernism seek to engage the viewer in an unmediated fashion – the viewer is able to interact with the structure directly and does not require in-depth knowledge of the structure in order to appropriate meaning from viewing it. The focus is not upon understanding the structure from an intellectual perspective depending primarily upon ones knowledge of architecture and architectural theory, but rather upon the structure evoking an emotional response from the viewer. By interacting with the structure the viewer is in a sense “consuming” the structure, at least in a visual sense.

Jameson (1984) believes that the city, irrespective of its political form, is the fundamental object of our postmodern society. This is significant as it speaks to two ideas. The first idea is that the city is an equalizing unit of comparison between nations; and the second is that cities can have similar patterns of development expressed through

their physical landscape despite having different political histories. Thus, the city's physical landscape, or cityscape symbolizes societal, cultural, political and economic trends with a particular space.

The above concepts are key to many scholars studying place marketing, notably Eisinger (2000), Hannigan (2002), Lowes (2002), Gibson & Lowes (2007), Witheford and Gruneau (1993) and Zukin (1991, 1995). In the works of these scholars such concepts serve to link the aesthetic production of images to the aesthetic production of the urban landscapes, while simultaneously incorporating the economic concept of production. This is one of the pillars of what place marketing focuses upon – how the built environment is being produced today and what the physical forms signify and communicate. Jameson (1984) ties the aesthetic production of postmodern architecture to economic factors such as the growing influence of multinational businesses in the development of the visual landscape. This argumentation implies that there is a particular mechanism that exists which results in the urban landscape of today, specifically there are specific economic factors that influence the aesthetically produced landscape, in addition to cultural and social influences. This line of thought is related to the work of David Harvey (1989*a*, 1989*b*, 1990, 2008), who writes on the political economic realities of postmodernism and its authority over how our urban landscapes or built environments are produced.

### *Space and Meaning*

Cities are in a sense comprised of various spaces, and therefore an understanding of what space is and how it acquires and communicates meaning is crucial to the central

argument of this thesis. Following Lefebvre (1991; see also Lowes, 2002) space is conceptualized as a product – as a thing - that has the ability to project meanings and messages (Lefebvre, 1991). In fact, space in this sense is infused with meaning. For Lefebvre (1991) in particular the most significant change in the organization of space today has been brought about by the substantial growth of tourism. Due to increases in tourism people now travel to a wider range of places with greater ease in order to visually and literally consume commodities that are produced within those spaces. This trend is different from previous historical periods where commodities or objects were circulated among people in fixed locations. This is inherently linked to the image of place that spaces or cities project as people will not travel to places to consume commodities if they do not see the places as appealing; offering commodities that are worthwhile being consumed. Lefebvre (1991) also speaks to the construction of history and society within urban spaces and how the city is a reflection of this construction, and thus is a cultural object commodified for visitors to consume (p.158-164). Lefebvre's work is strongly related to the work of Zukin (1991) who sees the urban landscape as being the major cultural product of our postmodern society (p.22-23).

Lefebvre's work lays the foundation for the theory behind the concept of place marketing and how civic boosters and urban elites construct distinct promotional discourses in an attempt to manage the projected image of place related to a particular physical landscape in order to garner capital. Urban elites are those who are in positions of power either politically or economically within the urban space and boosters are those who support and promote the ideas put forth by the urban elites because they also have a vested interest (Logan & Molotch, 2007). Along these lines, Knox (1993) argues that

marketing and advertising are important mechanisms in the construction of reality, as they provide the necessary tools to urban elites and boosters to construct a desired image of place related to the urban environment in order to attract investment and make profit.

Harvey (1989a) observes that a postmodern conception of society permits different realities to coexist within the same space. This is integral to the image construction aspect of place marketing as civic boosters and urban elites use place marketing as an instrument in the construction and projection of a very homogenized and specific image of place, often paying little attention to any pre-existing images of place that may exist. This aids in the emergence of an image versus reality gap typically fostered by place marketing strategies. The constructed image of place is designed to attract the visitor class, the consumer in an effort to attract capital, thus the image projected to local and global consumers is often significantly different to the reality or realities that the citizens experience daily. Nevertheless the constructed and projected image of place and the reality of place co-exist within the same physical space.

Benjamin's (Buck-Morss, 1989) thoughts on Hausmann's Paris in the early twentieth century are instructive here because not only does Benjamin speak to the production of urban spaces, but he also addresses how the image and the object contain meaning that is aesthetically, politically and economically produced. The above is considered "strategic beautification" as the physical and visual urban landscape are not permitted to develop organically, but are developed according to urban strategies, political motivations and economic reasoning (Buck-Morss, 1989, p.89-90). Benjamin argues that this "strategic beautification" (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 89-90) leads to an urban landscape that is mythical in-nature, creating a dream-like experience. This dream-like

experience is related to attracting consumers to a specific urban space in order to consume the space.

The commodities embodied in the physical landscape and which surround the consumer are designed for consumption and because of this the mass experience ceases to exist as the dream-like experience is primarily interested in servicing the needs of the individual and not the group (Buck-Morss, 1989). This is inherently tied to place marketing - not only because of the relation to how the urban space is produced but also because Benjamin is alluding to spectacular sites and sights of consumption where private consumers are valued over public citizens, which is directly related to the work of Zukin (1991, 1995). Thus, an individual's freedom – the consumer's freedom - becomes associated with one's ability to consume in “the dreamworld of mass culture” (Buck-Morss, 1989, p.253). In this sense Benjamin is speaking to the construction of an imagined experience or reality, which is often the result of the construction of an image of place central to place marketing strategies and the search for world-class city recognition.

### *Time and Space*

Another characteristic of postmodernism, which informs the theoretical framework of this thesis, is that it is considered by many theorists to be temporally and spatially different from previous historical periods. This line of thought has been developed in the context of urban communication primarily in the work of Giddens (1994), Harvey (1989a, 1989b, 1990), Lash and Urry (1994), Sassen (2001) and Soja (1996). A common interest in the works of these scholars is their attempt to develop a

better understanding of how the differences in the temporal and spatial organization of our society are expressed through and affects the production of the built environment.

Giddens (1984) argues that time-space is not something within which social relations exist, but rather, time-space features are what in fact construct social systems. Society as it exists today is attributed to changes that have occurred in the organization and conceptualization of time and space. Therefore, the reason why the postmodern society has certain characteristics is because it is spatially and temporally different than what has come before, thus producing a new social system. Many of the differences with respect to spatial and temporal organization can be attributed to advancements in technology, including communication technology. Due to the recent technological advances in our society, such as the telephone and the Internet, conceptions of time and space and the constraints that they place upon society cease to be as significant.

Giddens (1984) differs from other social theorists on this general point as he focuses his analysis upon space and then extrapolates to society in general; however, he does not apply his conception of time-space organization to the city nor does he acknowledge that the organization of time can differ between societies and spaces. For instance, Giddens (1984) does not distinguish between the way in which a Wall Street broker experiences time and the manner in which a farmer experiences time. Although it is apparent that a broker's individual experience of time and space are quite different from a farmer's, as one experiences time and space through mediated technologies and the other through nature.

Lash and Urry's (1994) central thesis is that changes in time-space relations have caused the emergence of a new economic system. They refer to this new economic

system as disorganized capitalism and it differs from the previous system of organized capitalism or Fordism (Lash and Urry, 1994). Organized capitalism characterized the Western economic system prior to the 1970s and is known for the standardization and mass production of objects. Disorganized capitalism differs from organized capitalism because as Lash and Urry (1994) argue the economy has ceased to be a production based economy and has become a consumption based economy. This means that rather than being driven by the production of objects the economy is now driven by the consumption of objects. Disorganized capitalism is applied to urban spaces by Lash and Urry (1994), who conclude that cities also find themselves in a position where they must have something to sell, something to be consumed in order to be successful.

Harvey (1989*b*) attributes the evolution to a post-Fordist economy or disorganized capitalism to the dual process of (a) flexible accumulation and (b) time-space compression (Harvey, 1989*a*). Time-space compression speaks to advances in information communication technology that have rendered geographical location less of a barrier for companies, as companies can now communicate internationally almost effortlessly. Thus, the cost and ease with which goods, people and information are able to travel has been significantly reduced, enabling corporations to operate in a more flexible and global economic environment. The relevant point with respect to the emergence of place marketing is that the choice of where corporations can locate and invest their capital has been significantly expanded. This has fostered the emergence of interurban competition or “place wars” (Lowes, 2002, p.4), where cities are competing with each other on an international level for a limited amount of resources. These resources are embodied in corporations’ decisions’ of where to invest capital and locate

their offices. This process leads to the increased importance of world-class city recognition as cities attempt to garner attention through the assets at their disposal. Thus, time-space compression inevitably affects the development and use of the urban landscape, as the urban landscape is the city's most valuable asset. If a city is neglected by investment capital negative economic and social implications may follow.

Flexible accumulation also addresses the dismantling of the postwar Fordist economy and speaks to the increased ability of corporations to be mobile on an international level due to the growth of communication systems, which connect nations, cities and people on a global level. Flexible accumulation addresses a corporation's increased choice with respect to an employable workforce. Corporations are no longer limited to a physical location or union, they are able to subcontract globally and employ the most cost efficient labour. Thus, although their head office may be in one city, the majority of their workforce could be in another city that offers lower wage rates and a larger and more diverse labour force. As corporations become more global due to time-space compression they become more flexible with respect to how they accumulate their capital. A city that is able to provide state of the art communication facilities and a large low cost work force is more attractive to investors than one that does not offer these characteristics.

Lash and Urry (1994) argue that their concept of "reflexive accumulation" (p.60) provides a better description of the current socio-economic processes than Harvey's (1989b) flexible accumulation. Lash and Urry (1994) argue that reflexive accumulation accounts for four aspects of our present day political economy, which flexible accumulation fails to address: (a) How production is increasingly based upon mediated

knowledge, (b) the succession of the material labour process by knowledge-intensive research and development, (c) the flexible form of analysis is too-production orientated and focused enough upon consumption, and (d) the extent to which culture has penetrated the economy and the role that the symbolic processes including the aesthetic components have saturated both consumption and production (p.60-61).

Rather than identifying weaknesses with respect to Harvey's (1989*b*) conceptualization of flexible accumulation, Lash and Urry (1994) have incorporated cultural theory and placed an emphasis upon the role of information as a catalyst for change that results in reflexive accumulation. This line of argumentation places them closer to authors such as Castells (1991) and Sassen (1991), both of whom interpret the growth of information systems as laying the foundation for the competition and differentiation between cities, rather than political economic factors. Although the informational perspective is extremely interesting, it will not be the focus of this thesis. However, the philosophy of reflexivity is relevant to this thesis as it addresses the aesthetic and symbol-processing activities expressed through the production of the built environment.

Flexible accumulation, time-space compression and reflexive accumulation have all aided in the development of built spaces that convey an image of prosperity and success as they promote interurban competition, which in turn encourages cities to focus upon attaining the world-class city status. At the very least cities hope to project a world-class city image to both local and global audiences in order to attract the attendant investment and tourism capital (Lowes, 2002).

In addition to fostering interurban competition, which has led to a stress being placed upon attaining a world-class city image, Harvey (1989*b*) argues that flexible accumulation and time-space compression, in combination with the introduction of neoliberal reform policies, have caused a shift from managerial systems of urban governance to entrepreneurial ones. Neoliberal reform policies appeared in the early 1970s and became synonymous with the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Neoliberal reforms were initiated due to the death of the industrial-based economy, which led to a need to develop another manner in which to stimulate growth in urban centers. These policies consisted of national governments turning towards a laissez-faire approach to governing that was expressed through the loosening of control over state and lower level government.

Specifically, the policies of neoliberalism include privatization, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the supremacy of the private sector in the development of society (Harvey, 1989*b*). These policies are embedded in a framework of zero-sum, inter-urban competition for resources, jobs and capital. Zero-sum refers to a competitive economic interchange where if one party stands to gain a specific amount then the other party stands to lose the equivalent. With respect to cities it would mean that if a company decided to invest in one city another city loses both the direct and indirect benefits of that capital investment. Most relevant to the proposed research is that even socialist societies will find themselves playing this zero-sum game of entrepreneurial urban governance due to the globalization of the capitalist system (Harvey, 1989*b*).

Against this background we can understand entrepreneurial urban governance as consisting of three main features: (a) public-private partnerships (PPPs), (b) speculative

urban planning and design where outcomes are unknown, and (c) the political economy of place rather than territory (Harvey, 1989*b*, p.7-8). The existence of entrepreneurial urban governance is central to this thesis, as its three characteristics have directly influenced the emergence of place marketing as it is currently practiced.

PPPs are a result of urban governments turning to private industry in search for investment dollars for their revitalization projects. These revitalization projects are often extremely costly and citizens either refuse to bear the extra tax burden or are simply unable to, therefore, municipal governments search for funding elsewhere (Eisinger, 2000). Urban revitalization projects are undertaken in an attempt to change the image of the downtown core that has been abandoned by industry in order to make it more attractive and distinguishable through stimulating a new urban economy based upon tourism, sports, culture and entertainment (Hannigan, 1996). Entertainment facilities include “sports stadiums and arenas, festival malls, performing arts centers, entertainment districts, casinos, and convention centers” (Eisinger, 2000, p. 331) that speak to the needs of the visitor. Geographer Ley (1980) argues that in the postindustrial city the allocation of resources in entertainment facilities and revitalization projects is related not only to the economic situation caused by the loss of industry but also to the political arena. This political interest in the production of the urban landscape is expressed through political lobbying. Nowhere is this process more evident than in place marketing and the practice of public-private partnerships, which foster lobbying by private interest and provide a space for private interest in urban development (Lay, 1980).

Speculative urban planning and design indicates an urban plan where outcomes are unknown, similar to a business venture. The urban elite chooses to pursue economic

revitalization projects in their urban centers where there is a large degree of risk and where there is no guaranteed positive outcome, rather than invest in projects that are more stable and reliable with respect to outcome. The city and its elites use the urban landscape in an attempt to accumulate capital. Little or no attention is heeded to the negative repercussions of such activities. If there are losses, they are justified as the cost of doing business. The central concept to extract here is that there is little or no attention given to the effects of this ad hoc urban development upon the citizens. This emphasizes the entrepreneurial aspect of urban governance.

The most important implication of the introduction of private interest into the public realm of cities is that the primary focus ceases to be what is best for the citizen and becomes what is best for the investor. The most profitable result for the investor is to attract as many consumers as possible, as without the consumer the investor will not make any return on their investment. This public-private partnership leads to the production of tourist spaces or what Zukin (1991) refers to as the Disneyfication of urban spaces. Thus, the primary purpose of the urban landscape becomes entertainment through spectacular sites of consumption, which then produces a profit for private interest through their consumption by consumers. Gotham (2002) summarizes, public spaces are being turned into private spaces of consumption and this transformation is exemplified through Harvey's (1989*b*) shift to the political economy of place over territory.

The political economy of place emphasizes image creation in urban spaces through its focus upon the production of entertainment facilities and spectacular sights and sites of consumption that address the needs of the consumer (Harvey, 1989*b*; Lowes, 2002; Rutheiser, 1996; Zukin, 1991). The above differs from the political economy of

territory that fosters socially beneficial projects, such as welfare programs and low-income housing developments that speak to the needs of the citizen (Harvey, 1989b; Zukin, 1991, 1995). Thus, all three characteristics lead to an urban landscape that is produced with profit, image and the consumer as its primary focus.

### *Construction of Meaning*

It is taken as a given that all meaning has been constructed however, understanding how meaning is constructed is germane to this thesis. As semiologist Preziosi (1979) argues, human semiosis and perception work in a cyclical fashion in conjunction with temporal aspects to construct and produce information and information is meaning. In addition Preziosi (1979) writes that information, and therefore meaning, can exist in either linguistic or architectonic form as both signify in processually-equivalent ways and they are designed to operate in context of each other (Preziosi, 1979, p.72). Here it is useful to define three of the central terms related to uncovering meaning in the physical landscape and its related promotional discourse and that will be used throughout the thesis.

The first term is sign, the second is symbol and the third is image. A sign is the base unit of language and used to construct all meaning. The concept of the sign is linguistically based, and is considered too unidirectional for the analysis of the urban landscape in its visual form (Preziosi, 1979; see also Hall, 1993). However, philosopher Pierce wrote about three different types of signs that are associated with the visual tradition rather than the linguistic tradition, two of which will be referred to here, the Icon (or the image) and the symbol (Rose, 2001, p.78). The icon is an image whose basic

building blocks are signs, it is a social construction that takes visual form, and the signifier represents the signified by having a likeness too it (Rose, 2001). Prior to proceeding with the definition for symbol the terms *signifier* for the *signified* must be defined. The signified is the concept or the object to which the signifier (the sound, word or image) refers too, for example, the word tree is not a tree but makes one think of the object. A symbol can be an image, a sound, or a narrative and it directs our attention towards the relationship between the word and it's object in the real world, however in a less concrete manner than the image (Jameson, 1972; Lash & Urry, 1994). There are many standardized symbols that occur in the various non-verbal dimensions of society, such as maps and icons (images) and even architectural objects (Leach, 1976). The relationship between images and symbols is intertwined and as Preziosi (1979) writes, "Icons and symbols are characteristically admixed such that most iconic signs will be at least partly symbolic and vice-versa" (p.71). Images and symbols are pertinent to this thesis because in our postmodern society the written word has been replaced by the image due partly to the focus upon the aesthetic. Therefore, by combining political economic theory and cultural theory a system of the production of meaning specific to the urban landscape emerges.

In this sense place marketing produces a particular set of images and symbols represented in entertainment facilities and spectacular sites of consumption and the promotional discourse that signify a world-class city status and through which the city is known. These spectacular sites of consumption and entertainment facilities denote particular lifestyle choices (Featherstone, 1987). For Lash and Urry (1994) the aesthetic of reflexivity speaks to decisions with respect to cultural consumption and most relevant

to this thesis the negotiated construction of place myths by tourists, as tourists choose which places to visit and consume based upon projected images of place. All of this is related to selling a commodity, in this case selling the city to the consumer or the visitor. Urban elites and civic boosters construct a particular image of place through the appropriation of signs and symbols expressed through entertainment facilities and spectacular sights and sites of consumption that tourists associate with being reflective of their personal characteristics and their lifestyle, or what they see as important and therefore they want to consume these objects and spaces (Featherstone, 1987).

Building on philosopher Baudrillard's (1994) work with respect to his concept of simulacra and the replacement of all real experiences by symbolic ones, Lash and Urry (1994) argue that every place is manufactured and produced and this results in a similar network of signs - the images and symbols being produced and reflected in the urban landscape. This is supported by the prevalence of place marketing and what Judd and Fainstein (1999) refer to the centrality of creating "places to play" (p.261) over places to live. This leads to a homogenization of place as the same or similar signs, symbols and images are reproduced globally. Andrew (2007; see also Zukin, 1991) in her case study of Ottawa concludes that place marketing reduces the differences between places through the production of the same signs and images as opposed to highlighting the differences between places in a search to produce a world class city image. Andrew (2007) is in agreement with Urry (1992) who argues that the preoccupation in society with the built environment means that all those involved in the process of constructing a city image, primarily civic elite and boosters are concerned about making it seem different, meanwhile they promote similar images of place reflected in entertainment facilities and

spectacular sites of consumption that have been proven to signify a world-class city.

Kearns and Philo (1993) concur with this line of thinking, arguing that the practice of selling places (place marketing) generates very similar and bland images of place despite the initial appearance of the practices ability to highlight variety of services offered by a particular city.

Urry (1992) writes on the globalization of the tourist gaze. The tourist gaze as defined by Urry (1992) refers to a process whereby people are able to “evaluate and compare places based upon images expressed through the television, movies, spectacular events and architecture, as well as, photographs from personal holidays” (p.9). People no longer have to leave their homes to experience difference places, but can do so from the comfort of their couches. This is one of the reasons why the projected image of place has become so central in the promotional discourse. Due to the globalization of the tourist gaze, the places that are being compared and contrasted are even further away than once imagined possible. The predominance of the tourist gaze also causes an emphasis to be placed upon place marketing, as people view images of places and decide whether to travel to or not to travel to a specific location. As Lash (1990) stresses, this emphasizes the increased importance of visual consumption along with physical consumption in our postmodern society, as the aesthetic (the images and symbols) characteristics of a particular city becomes the manner in which it is able to attract investors – either through business or tourism.

The theoretical notion of visual consumption is central to this thesis, it is another means by which tourists and residents alike can, in metaphorical terms, consume the built environment. Visual consumption speaks to the changes in the manner consumers are

reading, appropriating and being exploited by the built environment that surrounds them (Urry, 1992; see also Zukin, 1991). In these hyper-real environments embodied in entertainment facilities and spectacular sites of consumption, people are encouraged to consume signs and images (Eco, 1986; Hannigan 1996). This type of experience is made possible, not only due to technology, but also due to Harvey's (1989*b*) theory of time-space compression. Essentially, quality of urban life and its built spaces have become commodities along with the city itself, to be visually and traditionally consumed (Eisinger, 2000; Harvey, 2008; Zukin 1995). This has been caused by an urban political economy that is driven by investment capital, consumerism, tourism and cultural service in the service based economy, as well as, the economic and social changes initiated by neoliberal government reforms.

#### *Commodification and Sites/Sights of Consumption*

Urban sociologist Zukin (1991, 1995) has a more cultural approach to understanding the processes that occur within the built environment than Harvey (1989*a*, 1989*b*). Zukin (1991, 1995) builds on Harvey's ideas but discusses the role of power and commodification in more explicit terms and interprets urban landscapes as the major cultural product of our time and sees them as conveying a sense of place. For Zukin (1991) the commodification of the urban landscape is expressed through redevelopment projects that lead to landscapes of consumption rather than landscapes of industry, which result in the development of what she refers to as the symbolic economy. This shift from landscapes of industry to landscapes of consumption is analogous to Harvey's (1989*b*) shift from political economies of territory to those of place but from a consumption rather

than a production based interpretation. Eisinger (2000) also stresses the difference between building a city around entertainment facilities and building a city for the local residents.

Zukin's (1995) symbolic economy is an economy that operates upon the production and exchange of symbols and not products within a given space and speaks to the wants of the consumer and not the citizen. Zukin's symbolic economy incorporates Baudrillard's (1994) concept of the simulacra, in which he argues that reality has been replaced by signs and symbols. Thus, the urban landscape is seen as a cultural artifact belonging to a particular time and space that is constructed of signs and symbols, signifiers that convey meaning and whose primary purpose is to be consumed.

Zukin (1995) uses the symbolic economy and its cultural products to illustrate the primacy of the consumer in our postmodern society. Eisinger (2002) refers to this process as the bread and circus of city building. The bread and circus of city building is the process of building a city for the visitor and middle class in order to satisfy their demands and is orientated around consumption. Cities are not being sold as themselves, but as a projected image of how they want the world to see them. Lash and Urry (1994) argue that almost all aspects of social life have been aestheticized, not just the cultural industries.

In addition to discussing the economic elements of the culture of cities, Zukin (1995) addresses the central question: Who are the actors involved in the creation of these spectacular sights and sites of consumption? For Zukin (1995) actors are those responsible for the construction and production of the urban space and its associated images. Zukin (1995) asks: "But whose city? And whose culture?" (p.47). Thus, she is

interested in knowing who makes the decisions and who has the power in the urban space to decide which symbols and images will be employed in order to attract visitors and investors. Rutheiser (1996) and Lowes (2002) both refer to these actors as urban elite and civic boosters and argue, similarly to Zukin (1995), that they are in control of the image that is being projected to both local and global audiences.

Due to PPPs and interurban competition the urban elite and civic boosters operate within a system that values the world-class city classification, and most importantly profit. In order to achieve the dividends associated with world-class city recognition the urban elite and civic boosters, the actors, pursue spectacular sites of consumption most often expressed through entertainment facilities and spectacular architecture. As Eisinger (2000) argues, the purpose of these entertainment venues is twofold: the first purpose is to attract investment and the second is to garner attention and recognition on a local as well as global scale. Crucial to the analysis of these spectacular sites of consumption is that they are not truly public spaces, but rather they are private spaces as a cost is involved in their use. Thus, segments of the population – usually the lower classes - become excluded, as the cost involved in their use is prohibitive (Eisinger, 2000).

A central aspect of Zukin's (1991) work is the Disney Corporation and the birth of what Zukin calls "imagineering," which describes how a city is designed as an imaginary landscape (p. 241). This is related to what novelist Raban (1974) and geographer Knox (1993) argue with respect to cities and how they embody both the real and the imagined. Rutheiser (1996) supports Raban (1974) and builds on Zukin's thesis by arguing that cities are partially imagined, and the lines between reality and fantasy are often crossed. Zukin (1991) postulates that the city begins to resemble a utopian dream,

embodied in the development of the image of the service-sector society and reflected in its sites of consumption, the symbolic economy and spectacular architecture. This utopian dream, which is meant to reflect the reality of the city is created and supported by place marketing practices.

### *Gentrification*

In a capitalist system land and the improvements built onto it become commodities (Smith, 1979). Gentrification is a product of the revitalization projects and investment in the built environment that began throughout Europe and North America in the late 1970s and continues today. It was and is caused by a search for a way to accumulate capital in the post-industrial era. With respect to the literature on gentrification, there are two main divisions – the economic theorists and the cultural theorists. Economic theorists interpret gentrification as a production based development, whereas cultural theorists see it as consumption based.

Although Ley (1978) speaks to the consumption based explanation for gentrification, he does not negate the economic-production based explanation; rather he places more of an emphasis upon the social and cultural factors than the economic. Ley (1978) writes that the trigger for gentrification was the replacement of industrial workers by service industry workers. This caused “the values of consumption rather than production to guide central city land use decisions” (Ley, 1978, p. 11) therefore; cultural trends and consumer preferences are used to explain the emergence of gentrification, not the rent gap. Smith (1979) sees Ley’s (1978) point and admits that consumer choices are relevant to the process of gentrification, but only in the final phases. For Smith (1979)

the producers or actors (builders, developers, landlords, urban governments and tenants) dominate the consumer/producer relationship.

Gentrification is relevant because it is an aspect of place marketing and thus one of the products of the implementation of place marketing strategies. As Smith (1987) argues:

The crucial point about gentrification is that it involves not only a social change, but also, at the neighborhood scale, a physical change in the housing stock and economic change in the land and housing markets. It is this combination of social, physical and economic change that distinguishes gentrification as an identifiable process or set of processes. (p.463)

Therefore, gentrification not only represents changes within the economic structure of society reflected in the changes in the economic modes of production, but more importantly these changes manifest themselves in the physical landscape of the urban space, thus conveying meaning.

### *Ideology and Landscape*

An understanding of what ideology is and what it means must be developed in order to proceed further. For the purposes of this thesis the meaning of ideology will be taken from the works of Eagleton (1991) as his definition and construction of ideology provides a workable definition that is situated within a postmodern framework and speaks to the production of meaning within space. Eagleton (1991) argues that ideology is in essence a method that allows theoretical knowledge to be translated into more understandable terms. Therefore, ideology oversimplifies complex social process into

reality, providing a system of meaning and belief for the masses. However, ideology can be interpreted as somewhat misleading due to its tendency to oversimplify complex ideas. Thompson (1990) defines ideology as “meaning in the service of power” (p.7); therefore, it is those in positions of control, the leaders of society that use ideology, to communicate their beliefs and ideas to the masses.

Rose (1997) applies this concept of ideology to landscape. Rose (1997) and Zukin (1995) interpret landscape as a cultural product encoded with meaning, therefore the landscape communicates social interactions and power relations as it is those in positions of power, the urban elite who control the production of the urban landscape.

The landscape is a “visual ideology” (Rose, 1997, p.343) that illustrates the relationship of the powerful to their environment, which in turn becomes part of a hegemonic culture that helps to order society. All this is to say that the world-class city is not just an empirical object, but that it has both a material and signifying form (Lowes, 2002). Thus, the study of the urban landscape, through urban communication and the ideas of ideology, spectacle and the world class city all serve to convey meaning with respect to the dominant power relations and cultural values within that place just as the reading of any other more traditional text would.

Ley (1987) argues that architectural and aesthetic forms that are constructed and exist as part of the built environment evoke symbolic associations in the viewer. In order to support his argument, Ley (1987) uses the work of anthropologist Geertz who sees cultural products as readable. Therefore, according to Ley (1987) one is able to *read* the landscape and it reveals ideas, ideology, interest groups and power blocs affiliated with

its production. As Lowes (2002) concludes the city becomes a readable text, just like any other.

### *Place Promotion to Place Marketing*

Gotham (2002) provides a clear delineation of the relationship between the concepts of the spectacle and place marketing, defining the concept of the spectacle as being related to a consumer-dominated society that is organized around both the production and consumption of images and commodities. Gotham (2002) goes on to argue that the concept of the spectacle deludes individuals into believing that they can find happiness and fulfillment through consumption. This is essentially the role of the promotional discourse and the image projection related to a place marketing campaign – it seduces potential visitors and investors to the city because they believe the city embodies what they want. Through his work, Gotham (2002) interprets the dual concepts of commodification and spectacle embodied in tourism in order to provide a theoretical basis for understanding the marketing of cities.

A pivotal aspect of the literature that has yet to be addressed is how the current concept of place marketing differs from place promotion and why this difference is relevant to this thesis. It is increasingly difficult to say in a definitive manner what a city is because it depends upon the view – either literal or figurative -- that one takes. As Soja (1996) argues no city or lived space is ever completely knowable; drawing a comparison between a city and a human life, which he also interprets as is never completely knowable. Nevertheless, despite this difficulty in defining the space, the effort of

securing a specific image of place has been exercised in earnest since the 1870s throughout North America and Great Britain (Ward, 1994).

Since the development of cities as hubs of economic and cultural exchange, city officials and urban elites have been engaged in a process of place promotion. The efforts to fix an image of place exist whether one is interpreting the evolution of cities along cultural, ideological or economic lines (Philo & Kearns, 1993). However, the transformation from place promotion to place marketing signals a shift towards the development of a much more specific image of place being fixed, one that is centrally planned and organized and that has economic profits as its primary goal (Fretter, 1993). This is the central difference between the two concepts. This change was stimulated by the differences in the political economy, as well as social and cultural environments of our postmodern era.

Just as the 1970s precipitated a new era in economic practices facilitating the emergence of new forms of accumulation, production and consumption, they also triggered a shift away from established practices of place promotion. As Harvey (1989a), Ashworth and Voogd (1990), and Ward (1994) argue, the changes in the promotional methods used by cities are directly related to the changing structures of countries political economies reflected in their urban systems and cultures.

Soja (1996) addresses the difference between the initial stages of urban restructuring and the type of restructuring that exists in our current postmodern society, arguing that even the place marketing that emerged in the 1970s differs from that which exists today. Soja (1996) argues that during the 1970s urban revitalization through strategies of place marketing was a response to a crisis – the death of industry as the

primary mode of capital accumulation. Soja (1996) concludes that the new era of restructuring rather than being stimulated by crisis is stimulating a crisis: “restructuring-generating crisis” (p. 23); Soja (1996) perspectives stem from and are based upon the work of Ashworth and Voogd (1990) and Zukin (1991, 1995).

Another crucial difference between place promotion and place marketing is that since the introduction of private interest in urban governance, place marketing has extended far beyond the desire to sell an area in order to attract investment. Place marketing now serves to turn places into commodities (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). Zukin (1991, 1995) refers to the practice outlined by Ashworth and Voogd (1990) as the commodification of place. Although, Lash and Urry (1994) agree that urban spaces have become increasingly commodified, they see the results of this commodification as being positive in nature rather than negative. Lash and Urry (1994) do make some concrete distinctions with respect to the present day remaking of place, as they, like Ashworth and Voogd (1990, 1994), Soja (1996) and Ward (1994), note that place marketing as practiced today differs greatly from the place promotion of previous generations.

Lash and Urry (1994) outline three central points that they believe differentiate today’s place marketing from place promotion: (a) the importance of image and of an aesthetic reflexivity of place; (b) the impact of global flows, especially information, image and tourists that cause places to be remade with increasing rapidity; (c) the relative weakness of the national states with respect to the flows and their ability to effect the remaking of place (p.326). Lash and Urry’s (1994) central thesis is that all that is built melts into image and fits into the contemporary global economy of signs and spaces. Essentially, they are arguing that in our postmodern society images and the signs and

symbols they encompass have become paramount. In conjunction with time-space compression and reflexive accumulation the above has resulted in places being re-imaged with an attention to image never seen before, with very little attention being paid to substance or reality.

Eisinger (2000) presents four trends within society that are related to the above observations and summarize the distinction between place marketing and place promotion well: (a) the pace and variety of construction have increased, (b) the demographic and economic context is different, (c) the intended patron base has shifted from the city's residents to visitors, and (d) the scale of entertainment construction is significantly greater (p.319). The visitor's interests now take precedence over the needs and interests of the citizens of the city to a much greater extent. The focus of place marketing is no longer upon strengthening the city, despite the rhetoric, but in creating profit and attract consumers. Essentially, place marketing is aimed to ensure that urban activities and facilities are related as closely as possible to the demands and desires of the targeted customers and clients, neglecting the needs of the citizen (Fretter, 1993).

Another distinguishing feature of place marketing is that the creators and developers of the meanings and messages come from a much small pool of individuals and they tend to believe in the same ideology, due to the pressures of such phenomena as interurban competition. Place marketing is now a fundamental part of the planning and development of places, as dictated by the urban elite in conjunction with private interest, expressed more broadly through entrepreneurial urban governance (Harvey, 1989*b*).

In brief, place marketing is a strategy geared toward advertising a city in a particular frame of reference in order to garner capital just like selling a product. More

specifically it is an instrument used by city officials and urban elites to improve a particular cities competitive position within either a international or national market place, through a process of image management (Paddison, 1993). Place marketing emphasizes quality of life and the entertainment, services, and cultural attractions that are offered within the city to global consumers and investors, not to local citizens (Lowes, 2002).

A city is successful if it is perceived as being a good place to live, work, enjoy leisure activities and invest, essentially if it has a high standard of living (Ashworth & Voogd, 1994). It is the aesthetic values that are key to the success of a particular city over another. However, cities have histories, which dictate how perspective consumers view them, thus, there is an aggressive re-imaging and revitalizing effort associated with place marketing in the Western world in order to overcome pre-conceived notions of place (Goodwin, 1993; Holcomb, 1993; Paddison, 1993).

Parker and Long (2003) in conjunction with Waitt (1999) indicate that there is an aspect of place marketing which attempts to associate the new revitalized image with the old, in order to legitimize the re-imaging in the eyes of the citizen. This is done through the appropriation of images and physical relics of the past that are sanitized and hyper-realized for consumption in the present (Ward & Gold, 1994). This trend is evident in cities across the world, take for example Paris and the Eiffel Tower, New York and the Statue of Liberty, London and Big Ben. These monuments convey a sense of place which is associated with the history of that place, but is not necessarily based upon a reality of place. These spectacular structures have been appropriated by place marketing and associated with the image of place that urban elites and boosters wish to project.

Place marketing is embodied through boosterism, promotional discourse and the built environment. This image of place that is fixed through place marketing often involves an oversimplification and amplification of positive characteristics and a negation of any characteristics that could potentially be negatively interpreted. This process assists in the creation of a world-class city image that can be projected to both global and local markets (Waitt, 1999; see also Wilson, 1996). The ability to be recognized by consumers as a world-class city lies at the center of the place marketing phenomena, as it is what makes one able to compete on an international stage for investment capital, which is a necessity due to interurban competition. Those cities that fail to project world-class city images, thus fail to garner the capital required to continue growing, thus remaining competitive.

The work of Waitt (1999) and Wilson (1996) illustrate how framing expressed through place marketing, plays a central role in the image creation of a city. Waitt (1999) supports Harvey's (1989*b*) claim that urban government policies are primarily motivated by entrepreneurial goals, rather than by the welfare of society as a whole. Waitt (1999) uses Sydney as a case study to exemplify how the aesthetics of a city become commodities for consumption in our society. This idea of a landscape that has been commodified, expressed by Waitt (1999) in his case study of Sydney's Olympic bid, stems from Zukin's (1992, 1995) work. Waitt (1999) argues that due to place marketing and interurban competition, the characteristics of cities are oversimplified through promotional discourses and constructed images.

In his study of Glasgow, Scotland, Paddison (1993) compares place marketing to standard marketing strategies and techniques. This addresses the parallel that can be

drawn between cities and other commodities. Cities are increasingly akin to a pair of jeans or a can of coke, at least in the way that they are being sold to consumers and investors, through the use of specific images, the built environment and promotional discourse. Paddison (1993) suggests that city marketing is *framed* in economic terms and overlooks the societal implications resulting in the emergence of an image-reality gap. Place marketing constructs an image of place that speaks to the consumer in an attempt to entice them to visit the city and this image construction most often negates the reality of the urban space as experienced by the citizens. This brings Paddison (1999) in line with what Eisinger (2000), Harvey (1989*b*), Lowes (2002), Rutheiser (1996) and Zukin (1992, 1995) argue.

The literature presents many definitions of place marketing, thus, it is essential to establish a working definition for the purposes of this thesis. Place marketing, as defined by Gold and Ward (1994), is a process where local activities as presented by urban elites are closely related to the projected demands of a targeted consumer, with the intention of maximizing the social and economic functioning of the area. This definition, although broad, is appropriate as it addresses the emphasis that place marketing places upon the consumer. Much of the re-imagining and revitalizing that occurs speaks to the creation of potential profit. The city begins to resemble a business, as laid out by Harvey (1989*b*) in his discussion of entrepreneurial urban governance and Zukin (1991, 1995) and the symbolic economy. Parker and Long (2003) present a definition of place marketing that speaks to the mechanism of the practice. They argue that place marketing condenses narratives of local identity, culture and history in order to present a more appealing image to consumers, one that is more easily packaged and sold as a commodity. This definition

is relevant because it speaks to the aesthetic characteristic of place marketing, as well as, to the commodification involved with place marketing.

Although Lash and Urry (1994) distinguish between corporatist countries such as Germany and Japan and neoliberal countries such as the United States, Great Britain and France, there is little or no distinction with respect to countries which operate within an Eastern European frame of reference or even in a post-Soviet context. This appears to be the case despite the fact that it seems that the experience of neoliberal nations with respect to class distinctions is closer to what is occurring in some post-Soviet nations than the corporatist model. As neoliberal countries have developed society has increasingly been polarized between the university-educated information and advanced service sector professionals and a large number of low paying, low skilled jobs in services and manufacturing sector at the bottom of the ladder and one sees this mirrored in several post-Soviet states (Lash & Urry, 1994).

In a recent article Harvey (2008) applies his thesis with respect to the process of urbanization and the development of entrepreneurial urban governance on an international scale. Harvey (2008) argues that the urbanization process that exists in the United States and is concerned with profit and consumerism has undergone a second transformation of scale and become international. Therefore, although Astana is not a traditional neoliberal economy nor is it a country that exists within a traditional Western frame of reference perhaps the process of urbanization expressed through place marketing still applies. The globalization of urbanization is attributed to the property-market boom evident throughout Europe and Asia, which parallels the capitalist dynamic that exists in the United States (Harvey, 2008). Harvey (2008) refers to the urbanization

projects in the Middle East in places such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi that have resulted from the surplus capital arising from oil wealth as examples of the globalization of urbanization. Astana is also extremely resource rich and has profited a great deal from the production of oil since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, therefore it is a worthwhile endeavor to see whether Harvey's (2008) thesis is as true for Astana, as his Middle Eastern examples.

## Chapter 2:

### *Methodology*

A qualitative research approach is the most appropriate as this thesis is primarily concerned with gaining insights into people's subjective understandings and impressions of their current urban environment (Eid & Lagace, 2007). The thesis adopts an inductive approach, moving from the specific case study of Astana, Kazakhstan, to more general theories relating to place marketing in order to draw general conclusions with respect to place marketing as a global practice. Despite the use of a specific case study; the research is considered macro in nature because of the broader generalizations relating to urban communication theory that will be drawn.

A qualitative approach will also permit both the social and the economic implications of the creation of an image of place to be examined, while simultaneously garnering a greater understanding of how and why an image of place has been created in

Astana. In order to address the research question three different qualitative methods were used.

The first method that was used was the gathering and analysis of the promotional discourse related to the place marketing campaign for the city of Astana. These materials primarily consisted of government-produced brochures and DVDs, as well as magazines printed by independent, non-government sources. In addition to these promotional materials, a book written by President Nazarbayev was referred to throughout the thesis as it spoke in detail about the transfer and construction of the new capital city.

The second method of research employed was in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted with sixteen different individuals. The interviewees included urban elites, policymakers, former government officials, city architects and local residents of the city of Astana and Almaty. These interviewees enabled a greater understanding of how an image of place has been constructed in Astana, as well as a comparison between the impressions of the elites and those of the ordinary citizens of Kazakhstan with respect to Astana's image of place. In addition, a more in-depth understanding of the ideological rationale behind the promotional discourse and transfer of the capital city were uncovered through these in-depth interviews.

The third and final research method employed was observation. Observation is a useful method when trying to capture numerous social phenomena and, when carried out in a structured manner, is one of the purest forms of research as direct behaviours are observed in their natural environment (Kircher, 2007). In addition, observation often provides one with unforeseen findings that may be crucial in the final analysis, as was the case with Astana as the city's elite and boosters were very aware of promoting and

projecting a positive image of place, which led to interviewees stressing and highlighting a similar set of positive points while negating any facts that might reflect negatively upon the city and its image. Validity with observational research findings is considered high, although reliability and generalizability can be questioned, as replication is not always possible and any generalizations reached within this thesis are applicable only to this specific case study. However, when observation is combined with other qualitative methods, such as within this thesis, one is able to garner a very accurate impression of what is happening in a particular place. Thus, triangulation is achieved through the analysis of promotional materials, in-depth interviews and observation. This approach allowed for a more accurate conclusion to be drawn as the sources of research were diverse and triangulation served to highlight any inconsistencies or reinforce other points.

Despite the fact that many valuable results have been garnered through the use of qualitative research, it remains necessary to address the issue of subjectivity. The major strength of qualitative research with respect to the proposed research is that participants are often more likely to reveal their real emotions and reflections, either through the personal setting of in-depth interviews or through general observation (Eid & Lagace, 2007). However, in Astana, the opposite was found as urban elites and policymakers were found to provide rehearsed and standardized answers, this can be attributed to the high level of control exerted by President Nazarbayev within Astana and Kazakhstan in general, where in some cases members of the opposition have been incarcerated or have turned up dead (Olcott, 2002). However, this fear of voicing an opinion that differs from the dominant discourse can also be attributed to Kazakhstan's history as a former Soviet republic. The Soviet Union was a society that operated upon a system of fear and voicing

ones opinion led to violent retribution, incarceration, and death. Although the political environment is no where as controlled in Kazakhstan today as under Stalin the legacy of the Soviet era continues in Kazakhstan, where the citizens still remember Stalin's Purges and forced labour camps for dissidents, many of which were located in Kazakhstan.

Quantitative research would not have been appropriate for this thesis, as it would have failed to capture the nuances and subtleties that can be expressed through observation, in-depth interviews and analysis of the promotional material. In addition to the primary research that was undertaken several secondary sources were used to complement the primary research. The thesis will now turn to the analysis of the primary research.

### Chapter 3:

#### *World-Class Cities and Ideology*

The purpose of this chapter is to explore whether the theoretical foundations upon which urban communication and place marketing are founded exist in Astana. Specifically, I wanted to discover whether Astana has purposefully gone about constructing and projecting a world-class city image of place and whether Astana's landscape embodies a specific ideology.

Astana's vision: "To become economically competitive, distinctive capital of international statute, attractive and comfortable, dynamic and innovative city [*sic*]"

(Center of Stable Development [Brochure], 2008, p.2).

*Looking for a World-Class City*

In 1991 Astana was nothing more than a sleepy town that had been abandoned by the Soviets along with the Virgin Lands Project in the 1960s. Just as Kazakhstan is referred to as “The land that Disappeared”, Akmola (white tomb in Kazakh and one of the old names for Astana) was a city that time and the Soviets forgot (Robbins, 2007). It was during my first visit to Kazakhstan, in the summer of 2007, that I first heard of and consequently got to visit Astana. When I initially chose my thesis topic my peers had no idea what *Astana* was, let alone that it was a city and Kazakhstan’s new capital. Others had problems remembering the name of the city and had to Google Astana in order to find out what it was that I wanted to research. The decision by President Nazarbayev to relocate the capital city to Akmola was very risky, as he himself admits and is interpreted by some as not only an attempt build a magnificent new capital city, but also a legacy, “Just as Peter the Great built St Petersburg in a swamp, and Philip II of Spain turned a dusty village into Madrid, so President Nulsultan Nazarbayev has transformed a rundown, resting steppe town into a capital” (Robbins, 2007, p.96).

The purpose of the above is to demonstrate that fifteen years ago Akmola was nowhere in the minds of international investors and tourists. The country of Kazakhstan barely existed, not to mention its new capital in the middle of the steppe. As the literature suggests, a prominent and accepted manner through which to attract private investment to an urban center is through the creation and projection of an attractive image of place. This image of place is most often related to a plethora of world-class city amenities and services, ranging from restaurants and hotels to cultural centers and museums that an urban center can provide potential investors and consumers. This image

of place is also related to the construction of spectacular structures within the urban center, which are seen as signifiers of a world-class city.

The ascendancy of the image associated with a city and place marketing strategies is related to the emergence of interurban competition in the 1970s. The literature related to place marketing, which is supported by case studies of Western cities, indicates that consumers and investors alike increasingly decide whether or not to visit or invest in a particular city based upon the projected image of place. If this predominance of the image of place is true with respect to cities that are attempting to revitalize their economies, as indicated through case studies of Western cities then perhaps the emphasis upon image in Astana is even more crucial. This claim with respect to Astana is based upon three circumstances of which the city is victim. The first and perhaps the most important is that Astana is not a city that is being revitalized, but rather it is being built from the ground up. This is due to the fact that prior to July 1994 the city did not exist; this is especially true of the left bank of the city. The second point is that the city is geographically isolated not only from the world but from other parts of Kazakhstan as it is located in the middle of the steppe and sits in the centre of Kazakhstan. The third feature is that due to the capital city's relative newness and its political, cultural and economic history (or lack thereof), there is a general dearth of knowledge with respect to the city of Astana. Therefore, Astana's ability to construct and project a world-class image of place is essential to its ability to attract inward investment and compete internationally.

Thus, as indicated by the quote at the beginning of this chapter, there can be no doubt that the projection of a world-class city image to the international community is

central to the ideology behind Astana's creation as a city. In the words of President Nazarbayev (2008) "It is my hope that before too long the young capital will be hailed as the most beautiful city on Earth" (p.315). One of the most effective manners in which to achieve President Nazarbayev's "hope" is through place marketing and the construction of sights and sites of consumption and entertainment facilities which are all signifiers that convey a world-class city image (Lowes, 2002). As will be illustrated, these spectacular sights and sites of consumption and entertainment facilities abound in Astana.

Astana has been built as an architectural phenomenon, a "spectacular symbol of a new nation" (Center of Stable Development [Promotional DVD], 2008). The new left bank of the city is almost solely constituted of buildings that are spectacular in nature. The centerpieces of this *Eurasian Wonder* include (a) the Presidential Palace – Akorda, (b) the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (Pyramid), (c) Bayterek Tower, (c) the National Museum, (d) the Palace of Independence, and (e) the Akvarium (Aquarium) (Center of Stable Development [Promotional DVD], 2008). In addition to the above spectacular structures, flagship restaurants line the central boulevard, a newly developed riverfront that has a man-made beach and Khan Shatyr, which is a mini-indoor city that is temperature regulated to feel like summer even in winter and built under a glass tent. Astana is also in the midst of building three state-of-the-art sports facilities that address the role spectacular sporting events and sporting venues have in increasing a city's image internationally. These structures also serve to denote a particular lifestyle to potential visitors to the city who interpret these structures as signifiers of how they see themselves or how they would like others to see them; therefore they want to consume them.

As the literature review illustrates, a city's spectacular sights and sites of consumption function as its key symbolic places, and thus it is through these places that the city is imaged and marketed as a world-class city. In Astana, the aforementioned spectacular developments serve to project a world-class city image, garnering the desired international attention through both visitors and investors. Through these spectacular developments the city is selling more than just an image -- it is selling a lifestyle that is represented by the projected world-class image of place to the visitor class. This is related to the projection of a world-class city image because virtually all of the spaces within the city of Astana have been designed to project a specific image of place. The President's lack of shyness in proclaiming what a wonderful and rare city Astana is and writes how "Astana and its wonders are causing a stir even among the most experienced and well-traveled art lovers and tourists. Our capital reflects the spirit of the whole country: it can be found in every one of its streets, nooks and crannies" (Nazarbayev, 2008, p.315). Astana is, in effect, a large spectacular development, a centre for leisure and consumption. Zukin would refer to Astana as a consumption-based spatial complex (Lowes, 2002, p.26). The entire city is organized to not only facilitate but also, to maximize consumption, which has become the city's primary function. Truly public spaces, where there is no cost involved for usage are rare in Astana as public spaces do not garner as much attention in the form of capital from visitors as spectacular structures and entertainment facilities.

The city of Astana is divided between the right and left banks by the Ishym River; the new administrative centre is located on the left bank and the old Soviet part of the city – Akmola or Tselinograd (Virgin land) is located on the right bank. This division brings

up imagery of other world-class cities and national capitals such as Paris, where the locals always distinguish between *Rive-gauche* and *Rive-droit*. As Nazarbayev (2008) writes, “How many of the world’s capital cities were founded on rivers: St. Petersburg on the Neva, Moscow on the Moskva, Paris on the Seine and London and the Thames. Akmola, moreover, is in the center of Kazakhstan and all Eurasia (p.296).” It is apparent from such statements that Nazarbayev is attempting to draw comparisons between Astana and other world-class capital cities with respect to their physical landscape in an attempt to associate Astana’s image with that of other great world-class cities.

### *Why Hegemony?*

Despite Ley’s (1987) argumentation that the hegemonic model is too unidirectional to explain the relationship between the base and superstructure and power relationships related to culture and ideology it will be argued that in Astana this is not the case. There are many differences with respect to the political, economic and cultural history and construction of Kazakh society that make the hegemonic model useful in addressing issues of dominance and subordination with respect to the construction of an image of place through place marketing in Astana.

Many academics have addressed the role of organized social opposition to revitalization and re-imaging campaigns associated with place marketing and supported by urban elites and civic boosters in places such as Vancouver, Glasgow and Sydney (Lowes, 2002; Paddison, 1993; Waitt, 1999; Wilson, 1996). This trend of social opposition is not apparent in Astana despite a substantial image construction and

projection campaign that has been in progress over the past decade. In a landmark article that discusses the role of entrepreneurial forms of governance on the emergence of place marketing Harvey (1989*b*) argues that “. . . the ideology of locality, place and community becomes central to the political rhetoric of urban governance which concentrates on the idea of togetherness in defense against a hostile and threatening world of international trade and heightened competition” (p.14). This formulation of the role of ideology with respect to the image and construction of place is related to hegemony. Sadler (1993) uses Harvey’s understanding of ideology in conjunction with hegemony in his case study of the Conservative government in Great Britain in the 1980s to explain the lack of social opposition associated with the governments place marketing strategies. This thesis will attempt to do the same with Astana.

Gramsci’s writing on hegemony provides a useful lens through which to examine the relationship between the urban elite and the masses in Astana. Prior to continuing a definition of hegemony is required in order to establish what exactly the thesis is referring to and how hegemony operates. Hegemony is:

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12)

It is crucial to realize that despite the consent provided by the masses and their willingness to follow the dominant groups ideology, studies suggest they do not do so as automatons, but rather because they trust and respect their leaders. As Sadler (1993)

illustrates in his case study of Great Britain, just because the citizens are susceptible to the influence of the elites does not mean that they are “cultural dupes” (p. 177); rather they are influenced by history, capital and cultural norms. This is essentially what Gramsci is interested in examining: the ability of power to disseminate a particular ideology within a given culture without the use or threat of force. This concept can be related to the construction of the physical landscape as urban elites and civic boosters seek to project their vision and their ideology of place through the landscape.

The history of Western society is profuse with social upheaval and incidences of opposition to the ruling elite, exemplified through both the American and French Revolutions. Both of these revolutions stimulated change with respect to the political, economic and social organization of society while simultaneously empowering the masses. Lears (1985) addresses the effects of these types of revolutions with specific reference to the emergence of the producer ideology in the United States attributed to economist Adam Smith. Lears (1985) concludes that the producer ideology promoted by urban elites never became hegemonic because of a preoccupation with electoral politics, entrepreneurial ambitions and evangelical religion already present in society. The ruling elite was unable to use the producer ideology to control the masses because of the presence of other social realities within society and the masses’ belief in their own ability to effect change. This is not the case with the dominant ideology in Astana; one sees a similar situation as Sadler (1993) found to exist in Great Britain in the 1980s. The citizens of Astana lack such a base of experiences historically speaking and therefore they are more willing to bestow confidence and prestige upon the dominant ideology and group.

Change in Kazakhstan - whether political, economic, social or cultural has consistently been implemented from above and is represented by the rule of Kazakh Khanates and the Soviet Union and its dictators. As a political expert on Kazakhstan remarks: "The influence of nomadism, Khanates, and tribalism cannot be underestimated in the evolution of their [Kazakh] culture and attitudes" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee # 9). Not only is this linked to Sadler (1993), but more importantly Gramsci (1971) who writes how often the masses support the elite despite possible negative effects upon their lives, as they believe that the decisions are being made with their best interests in mind. This trend is observable in Astana where there is a history of strong rulers who associate their needs with those of the people and vice versa and who construct images of infallibility.

Beginning with Genghis Khan and continuing into the Soviet era with Stalin, the people of Kazakhstan have grown accustomed to having a dictator, whether embodied in a Tsar or a communist leader such as Stalin to guide them through their lives and make important decisions for them. As historian and expert on Kazakhstan Olcott (2000) observes "The USSR was not simply a continuation of the Russian empire; it was also a post imperial multinational state" (p.4) and as such it had a dictator to whom the people looked to for guidance and security. In addition, during the Tsarist era one has the development of a father figure association between the people and the Tsar and this father-child relationship was appropriated by the Soviets, especially by Stalin through the development of the cult of personality. This cult of personality led to the promulgation of a citizenry who idolize Stalin and saw him as infallible and always having the citizen's best interests at heart, despite glaring examples of the opposite such as the famine of

1931-33 and the Purges. President Nazarbayev (2008), who is a product of the Soviet system, was able to foster this same type of relationship with the citizens of Kazakhstan. This is combined with Nazarbayev being a direct descendent of the first tribe of Kazakhstan under the Khanates which gives him an incredible amount of respect from the people (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #9). As Nazarbayev writes:

It is very easy to whip up hysteria over unpopular decisions and present yourself as a kind of “voice of the people”. We have a lot of so-called politicians of the ilk. But it’s much harder and more important to convince people of the need for the decisions being taken and their promising prospects, in the face of discontent and lack of understanding. (p. 303)

Nazarbayev presents himself as a strong leader and due to his lineage he appears to be one of the people, who has a vision for the people and the country’s future. Gramsci (1971) also discusses the role of intellectuals of the same ilk as Nazarbayev in relation to the development of hegemonic rule. Gramsci (1971) writes about “organic” intellectuals who are able to provide a link between the masses and the elite, as Nazarbayev does through his bloodline, and how these organic intellectuals assume a “directive role” (p.4) within society, as Nazarbayev has done.

President Nazarbayev also embodies the fierce patriotism that the Kazakh people have for their nation. In his book he states that Astana is “where the heart of our *Fatherland* is now beating, and where Kazakhstan will determine its historic destiny at the turn of the third millennium (emphasis added)” (Nazarbayev, 2008, p.312). Most importantly, in this passage, the use of *Fatherland* is an attempt to co-opt the Soviet

Union's symbolic systems that are ingrained in the minds of the citizens and use them to justify his actions and get the masses to follow him. During the Soviet era the country was referred to as the *Motherland* and this wording was used to evoke patriotism and loyalty from the masses for such endeavors as the Second World War, referred to as the Great Patriotic War by the Soviets, despite high death tolls and devastating defeats. By changing the word to *Fatherland* the direct association with the Soviet era Motherland is removed, however the term still triggers an emotional patriotism due to the decades of indoctrination. This is related to the development of a sense of place, a sense of belonging that Nazarbayev is able to foster and use in order to illicit support from the masses for the construction of Astana's image of place as a world-class city.

This history makes it easier to understand why the citizens of Astana would support President Nazarbayev and his vision with respect to Kazakhstan and its shiny new capital. As a political and economic expert from the West who now lives in Kazakhstan observed, Kazakhstan has simply replaced a history of "malevolent dictators for a future with a benevolent dictator" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #9). Thus, one is able to see how and why the people of Kazakhstan assume that their leader Nazarbayev has their best interests in mind and this trust removes the need to resort to coercion and force to get the masses to follow what the leadership believes is the correct path. The people support his decisions not because of their lack of ability to think as previously stated, but rather because that is what their history dictates as the norm, the people do not wish for another system, this is the system they are comfortable with and the leader as well.

Returning briefly to examine Kazakhstan's history prior to the Russian Imperial times the Kazakh Khanate (a political entity ruled by a Khan, or King) system was based upon hierarchy – the will of the few imposed upon many. As historian Van der Leeuw (2006) observes:

The very special way of hierarchical communal-political thinking was preserved within the Kazakh community through out Russian Imperial and later on communist rule, and has a strong impact on political and socioeconomic life in Kazakhstan up to this day. (p.19).

It is clear that the political and economic history of Kazakhstan is paternalistic and highly dictatorial in nature, naturally fostering a hegemonic culture to exist despite recent independence and the introduction of democratic elections.

With independence came a chance to move towards a different form of political system. Olcott (2002) concludes:

In its first years, the country's ruling elite at least flirted with the idea of a transition to democracy and supported a thorough macroeconomic reform. But these promising beginnings were abandoned over time, and now the country shows every sign of developing into a family-run state. (p.2)

As one can imagine this trend has only been accelerated over the past six years. A former member of Kazakhstan's government believes that the population of Astana itself is "very entrepreneurial and Soviet-minded" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13), implying that although they enjoy the some of the freedoms offered by the introduction of Capitalism and democracy they remain influenced by strong leadership and are unfamiliar with the manner in which democracy operates.

Statistics also serve to illustrate the existence of hegemony in Astana. As President Nazarbayev (2008) admits, opinion polls taken in Almaty prior to the move of the capital indicated “62 per cent of residents were completely against any move to Akmola” (p. 307). In many other countries the majority of citizens being against the transfer of the capital would be enough to stop the transfer from occurring, however in Kazakhstan it was only a small stumbling block that was quickly overcome thanks to an “unabashedly autocratic form of government” (Olcott, 2002). Despite the autocratic form of government and the disregard shown for public opinion there is no tangible political pluralism that has developed in Kazakhstan. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that the citizens of Astana and Kazakhstan are generally satisfied with their leader as they are seeing improvements in their quality of life, irrespective of some of the negative effects of place marketing associated with the development of an image reality gap. As analyst and expert on the Central Asian region states, “In the current setting the opposition simply has nothing to work with” (Troianovski, 2007). Unlike the situation in Georgia and the Ukraine, where one saw the people uprising, the benefits for the citizens of Astana and Kazakhstan as a whole have been great enough for the citizens to continue to trust their leader.

“A city of the steppes eternally dreaming of freedom . . . A city it took us fifteen years to make our way to . . . A city today pointing the way to the future. Our way, the Kazakhstan way” (Nazarbayev, 2008, p.319). This statement by Nazarbayev embodies the link between place marketing strategies and hegemony. Nazarbayev has a dream for the new capital and the image it will project, which speaks to Harvey’s (1989b) assertion with respect to a “togetherness in defense against a hostile and threatening world” (p.14)

that can be associated with a place and the implementation of entrepreneurial urban governance and PPPs. Through the above statement and the promotional discourse associated with his place marketing campaign Nazarbayev is seeking to access the long standing desire of the Kazakh people to have an independent nation, free from the influence of foreign powers, specifically the Russians. The people feel that Nazarbayev's dream is their dream due to the powerful historical and cultural influences mentioned, such as tribalism, the Khanates and the Soviet system. Nowhere is this dream more clearly embodied than in the new capital – Astana.

In his study of Great Britain, Sadler (1993) speaks to three central reasons why the Conservatives were able to successfully use hegemony in the 1980s to justify and implement their re-imaging campaign. These three reasons are (a) the ascendancy of capital and business, (b) the reintegration of place with political strategy and the significance of the political for the social construction of place, and (c) the denial of debate. The last two characteristics have already been shown to exist in Astana through the strong history of tribalism and dictatorship which have led to a large amount of trust and faith given to those in political office, as illustrated through Nazarbayev's and his party's popularity despite decisions that go against the people's will.

Although President Nazarbayev holds the power and is in control of the vision of the country and its new capital, Kazakhstan does provide room for an opposition party. This opposition party holds regularly scheduled peaceful demonstrations, however as mentioned there is a lack of true political pluralism. Here it is of value to note that within the international arena Kazakhstan is being recognized for its advances with respect to the development of a democratic system of government by being awarded the

Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) chairmanship in 2010, although some argue it is too early (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #2). The OSCE chairmanship will keep pressure on Kazakhstan to maintain and continue its reforms. The political atmosphere in Kazakhstan is extremely complex and although there is an opposition party in parliament Kazakhstan lacks a truly open political system that accepts and welcomes challenges and diverging opinions. This is analogous to the environment observed by Sandler (1993) in Britain in the 1980s, although more extreme. The transfer of the capital to Astana illustrates this disregard for public opinion clearly and what is most interesting to note is that despite Nazarbayev's unpopular decision the people remained in support of his leadership – they believed that he was acting in their best interest.

The building of the new capital city and independence have brought the citizens entrepreneurial opportunities, the right to own private property and freedom of movement, among other privileges which they have never had access to and these new freedoms must be considered when examining the lack of opposition to constructing the new capital through the use of a place marketing campaign. For the first time in the history of the former Soviet Republic one has the emergence of a strong middle class and as one former government minister stated: “Compared to 1997 life has improved for everyone” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13 and Interviewee #9). This speaks to the “assimilative powers of the entrepreneurial ethos” (Lears, 1985, p.576), as well as to Sandler's (1993) point with respect to the ascendancy of capital and business. The citizens have been distracted by the images and services that are associated with the building of their new capital – a symbol of Kazakhstan and its independence, as

well as economic gains. The citizens are more inclined to follow a leader who offers them not only a strong, independent Kazakhstan embodied in the image of its new world-class capital city, but also economic opportunities previously unknown. As expert Sergei Panarin concludes he does “. . . not expect change to happen . . . while the country remains flush with petrodollars” (quoted in Trioanovski, 2007, A11). A political analyst and expert on the region agrees stating that “The middle class who owns property, who has consumer goods in markets and ‘Western stores’ will not easily let go of this new found wealth” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #9). The citizens, especially those who are benefiting are more than willing to support Nazarbayev and minimize any negative effects of constructing a world-class image of place in Astana.

The hegemonic model is not only an ideological mystification hiding the reality of the situation but it also serves the interests of ruling groups at the expense of the subordinate ones (Lears, 1985; Adamson, 1980). This is the case in Astana, where the place marketing efforts associated with the creation of the image of a world-class city seem to be mutually beneficial; however, as it became clear through research, observations and interviews, the building of the new capital city is not a completely altruistic process. As one government official said: “The building of Astana was to, how you say . . . wash the money” (Personal Correspondence, November 2008, Interviewee #1). This perspective is corroborated by many, including a Kazakh businessman who has been working in the country since the early 1990s and believes that those who benefited most from the building of Astana (and continue to benefit) were in positions of power – the civic elite. Olcott (2006) writes, “The top leaders of the country are all reported to have used political position for their own economic advantage” (p.124). Without taking

into consideration the allegations of corruption and assuming that the average person is better off financially than they were, they are not the ones who are benefiting from the five-star hotels and the brand spectacular developments but rather the ruling elite and the visitor class. As one resident put it: "It is difficult at work and often my morale is low" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #7), nevertheless, the people support Nazarbayev preferring "the devil they know" (Olcott, 2002).

The citizens of Astana have been somewhat complicit in their own victimization and have been swayed by the promotional and public discourse that as Lears (1985) argues serves to validate the ideas, values and experiences of the dominant groups, or in the case of Astana - group. During the course of my field research in Astana, it was difficult to find anybody who had anything negative to say. If there was discontent expressed, it was always specific and never aimed at Nazarbayev; even the diplomatic core and foreign businesses are hesitant to criticize. Perhaps this is where the benevolence of his dictatorship is so crucial, Nazarbayev continues to participate in bilateral, international and multinational organizations, working with the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN); this only serves to bolster the hegemonic nature of his rule as it promotes his image as a powerful leader making beneficial decisions for his country and his people.

Astana and the construction of the image of place associated with the capital have enabled Nazarbayev to develop a hegemonic system of control. Nazarbayev has co-opted the social and cultural history of place associating himself not only with the ancient tribal era through his pure Kazakh bloodline, but also with the Soviet era. These two factors in combination with the image of Astana as the symbol of the newly independent

Kazakhstan, serve to legitimize his vision and his strategy. In addition, Nazarbayev also uses the promise of new economic freedoms associated with the country's independence to gain public support. Opposition is absent because the subordinate groups do not see themselves as such; they see themselves as being included in the building of Astana and their country's future, as the history of place imbues Nazarbayev with prestige and confidence. This is what Astana is selling to its population –the freedom to accumulate capital. For the first time in the modern history of Kazakhstan, the citizens are permitted to own property and objects such as cars, houses and clothes that denote a certain social status. Just living in the capital city of Astana projects an image about who you are and what you represent.

Although Gramsci (1971) sees the line between the dominant and subordinate cultures as permeable, in general the dominant groups do not allow the subordinate group to voice their perspectives through public discourse, as this would be counter productive to their cause. The concept of having an open forum for discussion or a referendum is foreign not only to the citizens, but to the dominant group and their dominant ideology. As Eisinger (2002) illustrates through his case studies, public referenda to increase taxes are sometimes inevitable in urban spaces and the citizens almost always vote “no” when it comes to increasing taxes for entertainment facilities. However, due to the history of Kazakhstan and Astana, the idea of holding a referendum in order to evaluate the validity of the construction of the image of place or the process through which the city is constructed and revitalized is non-existent. The semblance of democracy and freedom through the presence of elections seems to be enough for the citizens, or at least the semblance of democracy in combination with entrepreneurial gains and opportunities.

More importantly, since the citizens feel to a large extent that Nazarbayev represents them and their beliefs, they have a shared history; therefore, they do not necessarily have a desire to voice their opposition perhaps because they feel that it would be voicing their opposition to Nazarbayev rather than to his politics.

In Astana you not only have the economic vision of President Nazarbayev and his supporters that binds the people to them but also you have the cultural justification used by Nazarbayev with respect to the building of the new capital. As a prominent official put it, “The goal was to have a new capital, a new country, a new independent country. Our president wanted to create for us a city to commemorate the future” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1). In addition the reintroduction of the Kazakh language, religion and art to society, as well as Kazakh history has provided a freedom that never existed within Soviet times with respect to legitimizing ones Kazakh heritage. The legitimacy of the country its history and new capital are all tied together by the ability to regulate the public discourse through the hegemonic rule of President Nazarbayev.

The citizens continue to support President Nazarbayev and his policies despite the following reality: “In the Soviet period healthcare was better, public schools were better and extracurricular programs were better. There is a lack of financing, lots of money goes to Astana’s development but not for healthcare and schools” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interview #13). This perspective is supported by the Akimat, who openly admit there are not enough kindergartens, schools in general or even hospitals (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11). This further supports the argument that the people have been swayed by the entrepreneurial

possibilities and the appearance of democracy and freedom, as well as independence and the appearance of the visual landscape embodied in their new capital.

In Kazakhstan, with the benevolent dictatorship of President Nazarbayev and the history of the masses following a supreme leader, the hegemonic model is quite accurate in explaining the lack of civic opposition to place marketing practices in Astana, as it was Sandler's (1993) case study of Great Britain. The hegemonic model locates mass culture in economic relations, but also with a ruling elite, in this case led by a president that is economically and politically dominant; there lacks a popularly supported opposition. The changes that are occurring in Kazakhstan generally and Astana specifically are state led. The people have freedom, but only within the parameters set by the state, and President Nazarbayev through the use of themes surrounding patriotism, strengthening independence, state-building and expanding the social, economic spheres and through the implementation of some political reforms has been able to convince the masses to follow him and his vision for Astana.

### *Ideology and the Urban Landscape*

Nazarbayev (2008) writes:

The capital's transfer became a pivotal moment in the emergence of a state ideology. Just as Moscow was once the ideal for every Soviet person, so, too, Astana is becoming a symbol of the country's development as a state. And, possibly, the concepts of patriotism and statehood are taking on their full meaning through this city's construction. Thousands of young men and women are

flocking to the new capital in search of a better future. And the young city is maturing with them. (p.318)

Nazarbayev's words make it clear that the city of Astana and its physical landscape are meant to represent much more than structures and spaces. Astana's landscape embodies a specific ideology, communicated through its built environment. In Astana there is an explicit, as well as an implicit, ideology; the former appeals to the local population and the latter to the global consumer or the visitor class. Thus, one can see how the city can be read as a text that expresses an ideology and specific power relations through its visual landscape (Preziosi, 1979; Ley, 1987; Zukin, 1991; Urry, 1992; see also Lowes, 2002). As Lowes (2002) argues with respect to Vancouver, the city's key public spaces are transformations of social and political ideologies into physical forms; thus the physical form of the structure assumes meaning. As Preziosi (1979) writes that both linguistic and architectonic systems share features, as they are both human semiotic systems. Therefore, Astana's symbolic structures, such as Bayterek Tower, the Pyramid and the Presidential Palace -Akorda have meaning and are filled with cultural significance for both a local and global audience.

Bayterek Tower is a spectacular sight of consumption. For the visitor class, the Tower represents an authentic experience that can be equated with such structures as the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Statue of Liberty in New York. Bayterek Tower is both a symbol of Astana emblazoned upon souvenirs and a physical structure for the visitor to consume while partaking in the experience of Astana as a city. For the citizens of Astana Bayterek speaks to their Kazakh heritage and tells the folktale of a holy tree in whose branches a mythological bird would lay a beautiful egg bright as the sun every night.

Each night a dragon would devour the egg; eventually the Kazakhs slew the dragon and since that time the sun has shone eternally on the nation of Kazakhstan and its capital city. The branches of the tree (represented by the spiky points at the top of the tower) reach into the sky and reflect Astana's bright future. In addition, there is a golden imprint of Nazarbayev's hand at the top of the Tower; when you place your hand in his imprint, the National anthem begins to play. Bayterek Tower represents for the citizens of Kazakhstan and Astana the nation's bright future, as well as its powerful leader. Thus, the Tower embodies two ideologies that speak to two different audiences.

Nazarbayev's (2008) sees Astana as "a symbolic city representing a dream come true (p.310)." The dream that has come true is that of a strong and independent Kazakhstan and also Nazarbayev's own dream for a new capital city to cement his place in history. The city and its physical landscape has now become the national emblem of the people however originally it was not the dream of the nation and the people, but rather of their leader as he is the one who took the decision to move the capital. As Lowes (2002) and others (Rutheiser, 1996; see also Zukin, 1991, 1995) argue, the visual landscape of the city represents the power relations within the urban space, for the landscape does not simply appear, but rather it is envisioned and then constructed to match the vision. As Ley (1988) explains it, "We have seen that international expositions are the product of elites including businessmen, politicians, designers, and artists. The fairs are built in their image and thus project a dominant ideology" (p.200). Applying this line of thinking to Astana it is clear that there is a dominant ideology that is expressed through the physical and visual landscape. In Astana the trend attributed to international expositions occurs on a larger scale because one is not addressing a specific

spectacular event that occurs over a fixed period of time, but rather a spectacular city in its entirety constructed by a dominant elite – Nazarbayev, reflective of the dominant ideology. This is attributed to the fact that the entire city of Astana is being built from the ground up, whereas in the West one sees revitalization projects that focus on the development of specific *objects* within the urban space that reflect the desires of dominant elites.

The principal architect of Astana's left bank, Kisho Kurokawa, gave an interview where he implies the power relations that are imbedded within the urban landscape of the city. When speaking about his master plan for the city of Astana, Kurokawa refers to it as a "work of art elaborated upon by the city authorities" (ACTAHA, 2008, p.20).

Kurokawa is insinuating that although he had specific ideological concepts in mind when designing the left bank of the city, the city's civic elite altered the master plan in order to reflect their desired messages and images. Thus, the image of place that is being constructed and expressed through the built environment and the landscape is imbued with both the cultural and political messages that the elite wish to project while simultaneously attracting as many consumers as possible and placating the citizens.

### *Astana and Post Modernity*

How is it that, despite Astana's differences from the West, it can still be considered to be located within a postmodern framework? A large part of the answer has to do with globalization, which has led to the pervasiveness of the capitalist system, time-space compression and flexible accumulation forcing countries to utilize place marketing techniques to remain competitive. Astana now exists within this globalized international

sphere and thus, must use similar systems of development in order to remain competitive in the global economy. In addition, Jameson's (1984) conclusions with respect to cities and their relation to postmodernism are important. Specifically, Jameson (1984) concluded that, although cities may differ with respect to political history, their development expressed through the physical landscape can be similar in nature. Therefore, despite having a different political and economic history from the West, Astana can still be situated within a postmodern framework with respect to how its built environment is produced and consumed.

There are some other central characteristics of postmodernism in Astana that permit one to classify the city as existing within a postmodern framework. These traits are expressed not only through the visual and physical landscape, but also through the promotional discourse that works in tandem with the physical landscape and permits a specific image of place to be fixed. These characteristics are the consumption-driven society associated with postmodernism, the importance of communication technology, and the focus upon diversity, peace and the environment, as well as a move away from monolithic political systems and controls. The central characteristic to keep in mind with respect to postmodernism and the urban space is that as a concept it speaks to the aesthetic or the image and not to the meaning or the discursive form; the signifier takes the place of the signified. This is definitely the case in Astana where the city's efforts are primarily focused upon the image projection aspect of the physical landscape (the signifier) rather than the development of a world-class city as defined by the Globalized and World Cities (GaWC) research network (the signified – the conceptual).

Just as neoliberalism encouraged new forms of accumulation and consumption in the West through the loosening of the political and economic environment, one could argue that the fall of the Soviet Union provided a similar loosening of controls and liberalization, economically and politically for Russia and the former Soviet republics. For the first time in seventy years the social, economic and political systems were deregulated on a scale previously unknown due to the power vacuum created post-collapse. Although Nazarbayev was part of the ruling elite during Soviet times and continues to rule today, there are many economic freedoms that exist today that never existed previously. For example, the right to own private property never existed in the USSR and now people are able to purchase apartments and condos and own them privately (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). In addition, for the first time there is a legal private industry evident in the natural resource sector and entrepreneurial sector of the economy. Thus, one has class differentiation within society based upon capital accumulation rather than state legislation. With the introduction of elections and new forms of economic operation, the country experienced a move away from traditional political structures and a state controlled economy.

The service sector accounts for the largest percentage of the gross regional product (GRP) in Astana, standing at forty percent, indicating that Astana is primarily operating upon a service-based economy (Center of Stable Economic Development [Brochure], 2008, p.10). This service based economy is built upon sites of consumption; thus although the city is also attempting to develop an industrial sector through special economic zones (SEZs) outside the city in order to further promote investment and foster an alternative source of employment, the industrial sector only represents five percent of

the GRP (Center for Economic Development [Brochure], 2008, p.10). This emphasis upon services related to sites of consumption is another indication that Astana fits into the postmodern mold, which is categorized by the move away from an industrial-based economy towards a service-based one.

Astana's built environment consists of postmodern objects that stimulate an emotional response. These objects are represented by the plethora of spectacular developments within the city. Jameson (1984) interprets the world space of the multicultural capital city as being the fundamental object of postmodernism. Astana fits into Jameson's (1984) categorization not only because it is a capital city, but also because it addresses the multicultural dimension of his interpretation of the symbol of postmodernism, despite the fact that there is a strong sense of patriotism that exists in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is home to at least 112 different ethnic groups and Nazarbayev has ensured ethnic and religious tolerance through the renaissance of the traditional religions through the building of mosques, synagogues and churches as central landmarks in the new capital and throughout the country (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #9). In addition, Kazakhstan has two official languages: Russian and Kazakh. The Pyramid of Peace and Reconciliation is a "modern multifaith cathedral . . . dedicated to the renunciation of violence and the promotion of faith and human equality" (Robbins, 2007). UNESCO awarded Astana 'City for Peace Prize' in 1999 because of its efforts to hold an all faiths conference in the Pyramid for Peace and Accord (Center for Stable Development [Promotional DVD], 2008). An Armenian who has been living in Astana for over ten years communicated that they felt that it was a very "open and tolerant place to live" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #7)

because there was no religious fundamentalism and they had the freedom to practice whichever religion they wished.

Kurokawa's master plan for the city addresses postmodernism through its philosophy and vision for the city, which are related to the preservation of the environment. Kurokawa designed the city of Astana with three main concepts in mind that speak to the importance of aligning the construction and development of the urban landscape with the city's natural environment: symbiosis, metabolism and abstract symbolism (Personal communication, November 2008, Interviewee #5 & [www.astana10.com/page.php?page\\_id=531&lang=3](http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page_id=531&lang=3)). Although, these tenets provide the foundations for the original master plan, the changes made to the master plan by the urban elites over the years have rendered the philosophy and the discursive thought with respect to Kurokawa's master plan rather superficial. Kurokawa refers to his master plan as "a work of art elaborated upon by city authorities, it possesses the implementation of state of the art technologies, while representing a symbiotic relationship between modern architecture and national traditions" (ACTAHA, 2008, p.20). The philosophy behind the buildings which make up his master plan has been discarded in favour of the image that the buildings project; only the signifier remains. Kurokawa's ideology has been distorted in favour of the dominant ideology.

The promotional discourse refers to Astana's as having no "rival as a communication hub between Europe and Asia" (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). Although this theme is recurrent in the promotional discourse, it does not seem to be a reality, except for the fact that Astana is located between Europe and Asia

geographically. It seems that it is stressed because that is the way that city would like to be seen by potential investors, a technologically advanced city.

An older woman refers to Astana as “a sort of Potemkin village” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #3), although she apologized afterwards for perhaps offending me. She is implying that Astana is a façade with no substance – the epitome of postmodernism. Perhaps the construction of Astana as a city is a reflection of postmodernism itself. Through its promotional discourse it attempts to present itself as embodying the more theoretical aspects of postmodernism - peace, diversity and the environment. However, the city’s landscape represents the reality. The reality is that, in Astana, the emphasis is firmly placed upon the image, the aesthetic, and consumption.

Thus, one can see how in Astana not only does the physical landscape embody and express a specific ideology associated with the dominant group, but how there also exists an effort by the urban elite and civic boosters to construct a specific image of place. In addition, the use of hegemony by the dominant group is clearly present and accounts for the absence of an organized mass opposition to place marketing and its practices as the people believe that all decisions are being made with their best interests in mind and they are also placated by the presence of some material and economic freedoms and benefits. Now that these crucial traits of urban communication and place marketing have been established to exist the thesis must now attempt to determine whether the specific characteristics and mechanisms of place marketing are evident in Astana.

## Chapter 4:

### *Astana's Place Marketing: Different Causes, Same Result*

This chapter seeks to build upon what was established in the previous chapter – more specifically the idea that Astana's landscape communicates a specific ideology of place associated with being recognized and projecting the image of a world-class city. The thesis will now examine whether place marketing has been used to project and construct the world-class image of place associated with Astana in order to attract investment. The use of place marketing techniques have been shown throughout the West to be one of the most popular strategies used by urban governments to construct, project, and promote their newly revitalized urban landscapes and the images of place associated with said landscapes. In addition, there have been countless case studies conducted in order to determine the specific mechanisms of place marketing. Thus, in order to respond to the research question in this thesis and uncover whether place marketing is a purely Western phenomenon, it must be demonstrated that place marketing literature can be applied to Astana. Therefore, this chapter is primarily concerned with analyzing the promotional discourses and other primary sources in order to determine whether it can be concluded that place marketing expresses itself similarly in Astana as it does in case studies of Western cities.

#### *Actors and how they differ*

The actors involved in the construction of an image of place are central to place marketing literature. This is because it is the actors who control the construction of an

image of place and it is their dominant ideology that is communicated through the physical landscape. The literature from previous case studies refers to these actors as urban elites and civic boosters who act in unison in order to reach a mutual goal with respect to the revitalization of the urban landscape. These actors represent both the power interests and capital interests involved in place making and place marketing; thus, they play a large role in determining the final physical appearance of the built environment. The urban elites, in combination with private interest, influence the manner in which a city is revitalized through its public spaces that are commodified and sold to the international consumer.

Place marketing case studies of Western cities have always emphasized not only PPPs but also urban elites working as a coalition. Urban elites have a vested interest in developing sites of consumption and entertainment facilities that they believe will promote economic growth and project a world-class city image, thereby attracting consumers either through business or through the visitor class. Urban elites use promotional discourses and boosterism to convince the local population that the place marketing strategy that they have chosen is the appropriate one. Astana differs from the multitude of published case studies – with their almost invariable focus on Western cities – in that the city of Astana itself and the structures and spaces that combine to form the urban landscape are the vision, the dream of one man, one actor who delegates and dictates to those beneath him. President Nazarbayev represents the coalition of the urban elite and civic boosters seen in Western case studies. Nothing occurs without his express approval. Returning to Zukin's (1995) question "whose city?", with respect to Astana the answer is Nazarbayev's.

In his memoirs of the first fifteen years of Kazakhstan's independence, Nazarbayev devotes a chapter to his new capital city. He writes how both the idea of transferring the capital from Almaty to Astana and its construction came to him in 1992 (Nazarbayev, 2008). The promotional discourse supports his role as creator of the city of Astana. One promotional DVD opens with a widescreen shot of the city of Astana and a bombastic voice stating that the city was "the singular vision of President Nazarbayev" (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). The political elites who form Nazarbayev's government support both the promotional discourse and Nazarbayev. When interviewed and asked what they thought of Astana the political elites would often respond: "First I would like to say that I am extremely proud of my President" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #14). Internationally renowned literary figure Paulo Coelho is quoted on the capital's website as saying the "New capital Astana is the fruit of the vision of President Nazarbayev" ([http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page\\_id=531&lang=3](http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page_id=531&lang=3)). Nazarbayev's position as the central figure in the construction of Astana is exemplified, not only through his own statements, but also through those made by his political henchmen, the promotional discourse and the international community.

Nazarbayev's centrality with respect to the vision of the city and to the realization of that vision is expressed through the built environment. A small anecdote illustrates the above point well. Nazarbayev is said to have called the Akim's Office one morning (the mayor's office) and told them that the Ishym river that runs through the center of Astana needed to be deeper because he would like to see large boats sailing down the river during the summer months. The Akim's office immediately sent dredging machines out

into the river to make it deeper and fulfill the president's vision. There was no debate and no discussion with respect to the budget or any attention given to what the effects of such action would be upon the citizens (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #2). His wish literally came true; his vision was realized.

The above anecdote is paralleled in an interview given by the Mayor of Astana Imangali Tasmagambetov to *Tengri* magazine. Mayor Tasmagambetov discusses the central objectives for the tenth anniversary celebrations for the city of Astana and how the President personally set them (Dzhananova, 2008b, p.38). Generally one would assume that the organization and planning for the celebration of a city's anniversary would be the responsibility of the municipal government headed by the mayor. However, in Astana due to the control and power held by Nazarbayev over the image of the city, the mayor and his civic elite merely present in order to implement the President's plan; they are voiceless and powerless with respect to this issue.

A crucial point to be made here is that not everyone's dreams come true, especially not in a so-called democratic country where you must convince members of the government to vote for your idea in order to make it a reality. As one journalist in Kazakhstan writes in his article titled *President Nazarbayev's personal capital*: "Only in conditions where there is no democracy can epoch-making projects emerge that nobody understands. No strategic considerations can justify the diversion of vast funds from the payment of wages and pensions and solution of the country's social problems" (As quoted in Nazarbayev, 2008). This journalist is correct in his assessment at least with respect to the lack of democratic process.

This lack of democratic process with respect to Astana's construction and Nazarbayev's central decision making role is evident not only with respect to the current construction of the image of place and the sites of consumption, but also with respect to the decision to transfer the capital from Almaty to Astana. There is a long list of official reasons provided through interviews, the promotional material, and in Nazarbayev's book for the necessity of the move of the capital city from Almaty to Astana, which are identical. Irrespective of the fact that many if not all of the reasons may be legitimate (for example, high pollution levels in the city of Almaty, limited room for growth due to the presence of the mountains, overcrowding, the need to populate the northern part of the country in order to prevent encroachment by the Russians, seismic activity, removal of the old Soviet guard, and moving the capital further away from the border with China) it seems that the real reason was as simple as "our president wanted something after him [*sic*]" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1).

Nothing speaks to Nazarbayev's legacy creation and power more than the process through which Astana became the capital of Kazakhstan. It is well known and admitted even by Nazarbayev himself that the majority of government officials and the civic elite were against the transfer of the capital city to Akmola. Despite this opposition, the legislation with respect to the transfer of the capital city of Kazakhstan was passed because Nazarbayev had arranged for the debate to occur on his birthday July 6<sup>th</sup> 1994 (Nazarbayev, 2008). Thus, the approval to transfer the capital (with no specific date, or timeline set) was passed by the members of parliament as a birthday present to their president ([http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page\\_id=531&lang=3](http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page_id=531&lang=3)). This type of action within government would never occur in a Western framework where the

democratic process holds officials accountable, despite levels of corruption that may exist. The rule of majority exists and is followed.

In addition, the ‘decree on the new of the capital of Kazakhstan’ on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1995, in which instructions were given with respect to the relocation of the capital, was not a vote within the government, but a decree issued by Nazarbayev (Nazarbayev, 2008). The government and the people had no choice. Not only was the decision to accept the transfer of the capital a gift to the president, but he superceded the rest of the government when he got tired of waiting and a year later used a presidential decree to move the capital to Akmola, as Astana was known at the time.

The story of how Akmola become Astana also illustrates the centrality of Nazarbayev with respect to the construction of the new capital. Although just a simple quotation, it illustrates precisely the manner in which power is distributed in Kazakhstan in general and Astana specifically. Nazarbayev writes that everyone agreed that there was a need to rename the capital and that many ideas were put forth; as an example, he lists his first name *Nulsultan* as a possible choice. He disagreed with all of the choices; however, he was not concerned as “one night the perfect name for the capital came to me – Astana” (Nazarbayev, 2008, p.313)! There can be no doubt that every detail with respect to the construction of Astana as a city commencing with the vision of the city, the manner in which the capital was transferred and the naming of the city were all directed by Nazarbayev.

In the case of Astana, Nazarbayev embodies the coalition of urban elites that exist in Western case studies of place marketing. The joint personas of dreamers and promoters have been combined into one central figure. As Lowes (2002) illustrates

through his case study of Vancouver place entrepreneurs, powerful coalitions of developers, political and business elites are “the principal architects of urban development” (p.113). The same argumentation can be made in Astana; however, in Astana it is clear that there is only one architect, one place entrepreneur – President Nazarbayev. Therefore, the city’s visual landscape expressed through sites of consumption such as entertainment facilities are a manifestation of Nazarbayev’s interests and sensibilities.

This argumentation is supported by the concept of the visual landscape as an ideology, embedding meaning and power relations that can be read the same as any other tradition text, which is supported by authors such as Preziosi (1979), Ley (1987), Rose (1997) and Lowes (2002). Nazarbayev is the singular civic elite with any real decision-making power in Astana and therefore he controls the development of the built environment. His priorities affect patterns of land use and therefore the development of the built environment, along with the public budget. The visual landscape then reflects Nazarbayev’s vision, his power and the expression of both. It is important to realize that Nazarbayev does not seek to control the development of the built environment for selfless reasons despite the rhetoric, but rather he seeks to produce wealth and power for himself and those in his close circle. In addition, it illustrates that among other things Astana is Nazarbayev’s legacy, the city’s spectacular developments reflect his will.

From the above it has been established that President Nazarbayev is the dominant actor in Astana. Although Nazarbayev firmly controls the construction of the built environment, as well as the image of place associated with Astana he does have a close circle of urban elites who assist in the implementation of his vision. Therefore, as in

other case studies in the West such as New York, Ottawa, Baltimore, Washington and a plethora of other cities both power and vested interest exist with respect to the revitalization and construction of an image of place in order to accumulate capital (Andrew, 2007; Gibson, 2007; Harvey, 1989*b*; Zukin, 1991, 1995). It is now essential to turn to the shifts in society that permitted place marketing to emerge as a practice and to determine whether those societal shifts exist in Astana.

#### *How Place Marketing Evolved*

Astana's political, economic, cultural and social history differs greatly from those of Western cities typified in place marketing case studies. Nevertheless many of the characteristics that fostered the emergence place marketing as a tool of urban revitalization in the West exist in Astana. Academics generally agree that three economic transformations are responsible for the professionalization of place marketing as an organized practice employed by urban elites to stimulate capital accumulation within urban spaces. These transformations are the emergence of disorganized capitalism (post-Fordism), flexible accumulation and time-space compression (Harvey, 1989*a*, 1989*b* & Lash & Urry, 1994). These economic transformations are not only associated with our postmodern society and evident in case studies of Western cities, but they also exist in Astana.

Chapter three addresses the characteristics of postmodernity as they are expressed in Astana and therefore, it can be inferred that Astana exists within a distinctly

consumption based economy that encompasses the aforementioned economic concepts: disorganized capitalism, flexible accumulation and time-space compression. We are currently living in a period of international capitalism. This era of international capitalism is attributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which removed the division between the capitalist and socialist approaches to economics that had defined society in the Cold War era (Harvey, 2008). Since the “markets have been globalized,” (Zukin, 1991, p.12) cities find themselves in a position where they must produce something to sell to the consumer in order to be successful and survive and this has led to a broadening of place marketing practices. Cities can no longer isolate themselves economically and continue to remain competitive; thus due partly to globalization and partly to the collapse of the Soviet Union Astana has been subsumed into disorganized capitalism and finds itself affected by flexible accumulation and time-space compression in the same manner as other places across the globe, irrespective of their location.

One of the primary manners in which Astana is affected by the processes of flexible accumulation and time-space compression is that the joint processes serve to make *places* more equal; thus, differentiation becomes crucial in order to attract the investment required to grow. Therefore, cities, such as Astana, turn to place marketing as a tool to differentiate the urban landscape from the surrounding urban landscapes in order to attract the capital investment required to grow. Especially in Astana’s case, where there was not a city to speak of fifteen years ago, the need to project a world-class city image in order to attract investment was even more important as the city was not only easily forgotten, but hardly known. As Zukin (1995) writes, “culture is more and more

the business of cities” (p.2); so through place marketing and the construction of place it is the culture of the place that is being sold to the potential investors through its symbolic places. There can be no doubt that this commodification of culture is apparent in Astana, where the emphasis has been squarely placed upon the sites and sights of consumption as a manner to generate international attention through image projection (Zukin, 1995).

Flexible accumulation and time-space compression have created a situation where cities have become the primary source of their own growth strategies through the production of commodities, as opposed to industry (Logan & Molotch, 2007). The construction of the city of Astana follows the above formula. As Nazarbayev (2008) writes, “Everything derived from it [*the capital*] was to increase the state’s national wealth” (p.301). One only has to replace the word *city* for *state* in this quotation to see that Astana is following the same model as Western cities with respect to constructing an image of place along spectacular lines in order to boost capital accumulation. However, in Astana perhaps this phenomenon is occurring on an even larger scale. The use of the word *state* hints at the even more grandiose attempt by Nazarbayev to use the objects produced within the city not only to construct a new image of place in order to accumulate capital for the city, but to use Astana to do the same for the entire country; essentially, *Astana is Kazakhstan*. The broad economic shifts outlined above have led academics such as Harvey (1989b) to write about the specific economic situations that have provided the space for today’s place marketing and its focus upon the construction and projection of the image of a world-class city.

*Kazakhstan’s Neoliberalism*

If one were to examine neoliberalism as a changing of the guard with respect to economic policy, than one could argue that the fall of the Soviet Union stimulated a similar type of all-encompassing change with respect to economic policy within Kazakhstan as the death of industry did in North America, Great Britain and Canada. Neoliberal policies consist of three central characteristics: privatization, dismantling of the welfare state and deregulation (Harvey, 1989*b*). It will be argued that these three characteristics were evident and remain evident in today's Kazakhstan and therefore Astana, which consequentially serves to explain the emergence of entrepreneurial urban governance and place marketing in Astana.

During the Soviet era, all assets were state owned; there was no such thing as private ownership, let alone private enterprise. All natural resources, businesses, newspapers, and other enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures were owned and operated by the state. With the collapse of the Soviet Union came the rapid crumbling of its top-heavy, control orientated economic system. The disintegration of the Soviet economic machine created a space for new economic approaches in the region. This led to mass privatization as illustrated in the following quotation:

Nazarbayev, as well as others in positions of prominence, moved quickly to position trusted friends and family members in posts that managed the country's foreign economic relations so that state assets might become personal ones in case independence proved short-lived. If independence was sustained then Kazakhstan's wealth would come under the more permanent control of the local elite since they supervised the economic reform process that would transform state holdings into privately owned property (Olcott, 2002, p. 42)

This is privatization on a grand scale, far beyond what was seen in the West under neoliberalism. Everything that was once owned by the state became privately owned by a handful of elites. Although the process of privatization in the West is interpreted as having occurred in a more transparent manner and with more open competition for the state's former assets, the point remains that large-scale privatization exists in Astana and Kazakhstan. Therefore, the general principle remains that Kazakhstan, similarly to the West, embarked in 1995 upon a new economic policy with privatization and heavy foreign investment acting as its backbone (Olcott, 2002).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the massive welfare state that it supported collapsed as well, including state pensions, health care, housing, education and the like. The collapse of the Soviet welfare state is illustrated through the initial debates where opposition was voiced with respect to the transfer of the capital of Kazakhstan from Almaty to Astana. The majority of parliamentarians were opposed to Nazarbayev's vision, arguing that any excess funds should be allocated to deteriorating social programs (Nazarbayev, 2008). In addition, some media sources, not owned by Nazarbayev's inner circle, were critical of the vast allocation of sums to the building of Astana when those funds could be used to pay wages and pensions, as well as solve some of the country's other social problems. The lack of funding by the state with respect to social programs continues ten years later as one former member of the political elite states: "Healthcare, public schools and extracurricular programs were better in the Soviet period" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). There are no social safety nets in the newly capitalist privatized Kazakhstan. One young woman described how she was offered a promotion with her current employer that would involve moving to Astana.

The young woman explains that if she were to take the promotion and move to Astana, she would have no recourse should she lose her job and the situation would be very bad for her as she would not be able to afford the cost of living. The young woman chose to take another position in Almaty, with a different employer so that she could continue to live at home and help her family and they could help support her if she were to lose her job. She also explains that this way she would be able help her parents pay for her younger brother's University costs (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #4). In effect the state is stepping out of the private lives of their citizens, with respect to creating social safety nets, paralleling the shift that occurred in the West during the 1970s.

Deregulation and the supremacy of the private sector in the development of society has become the rule in Astana; this trend is primarily attributed to the vast untapped oil and gas reserves in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev and his elite have capitalized upon the opportunities offered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and now each has extensive private holdings in some of the most lucrative industries in the country and the world (Olcott, 2002). Therefore, although Nazarbayev's elite are public servants who work for the state, they also represent private interests and there can be no doubt that just like any other businesspeople, the interests of Nazarbayev and his elites lie in stimulating investment, reducing investment barriers, thereby creating more opportunities for foreign companies to invest in Astana. Just as neoliberalism provides private interests with the opportunity to dominate public and social life in the Western world, the same can be said of Kazakhstan's brand of neoliberalism; however, in Astana the difference between the private business interests that stand to benefit represent the urban elite and civic boosters

who created the space for the investment opportunities in the first place is almost non-existent in certain cases. Essentially the line between public and private is even less existent in Astana than in the West.

The promotional discourse in Astana addresses the importance of creating and fostering a “favourable investment environment” (Center of Stable Development [Brochure], 2008, p.5). This is achieved through the introduction of neoliberal economic policies that encompass a combination of tax cuts and growth in tax expenditures steered by private initiatives, which include enterprise zones, empowerment zones, and urban development corporations (Gotham & Haubert, 2007, p.27). These strategies make a city or certain areas within the city appear more favourable for investment and are prevalent in cities in North American, Great Britain and Australia as Lowes (2002), Paddison (1993), Waitt (1999) and Zukin (1991, 1995) illustrate through their individual case studies. These initiatives also exist in Astana and are embodied in two separate Special Economic Zones (SEZs) within the city. The first SEZ addresses the development of the left bank – the new administrative area of the city. The second SEZ is designed to bring world-class industries to Astana through a special industrial area located on the outskirts of the city (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11).

The first SEZ is referred to as “Astana New City” and the promotional discourse speaks to seven benefits offered by the SEZ on the left bank: (a) steady national economic development of Kazakhstan, (b) Astana a young dynamic capital city, (c) shortness of demand for infrastructure objects (offices, commercial centers, culture and sports objects and facilities, education service objects), (d) tax and customs privileges under national legislation, (e) streamlined registration proceedings and decision-making

process for investment objects, (f) permissive labour legislation, (g) presence of international and national brands ([www.sezastana.kz/eng/kazsez.html](http://www.sezastana.kz/eng/kazsez.html) and Center of Stable Development [Brochure], 2008, p.6). Since the introduction of “Astana New City,” SEZ 162 new buildings have been built and the total investment in the city’s development reached 442.6 billion KZT; 239.4 billion of which was fully absorbed by the State (<http://en.government.kz/site/Reviews/rev1>). This is the equivalent of approximately 3.6 billion Canadian dollars. It is important to realize that there are several different figures that represent the level of monetary investment in Astana; it is difficult to gauge how accurate they are because access to official records is highly restricted and confidential. Suffice it to say that the monetary investment in the construction of Astana has been monumental.

This industrial SEZ located just on the outskirts already has plots available with the required infrastructure already present; for example, electricity and water and sewage systems (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11). These SEZs make the environment in Astana more hospitable for investment, therefore greatly decreasing the costs incurred by multinational corporations such as General Electric (who have recently started building a manufacturing plant in Astana) and others who choose to invest in Astana. The same conclusion can be drawn with respect to the SEZ in the city center: the local government in Astana has provided an enticing investment opportunity. These policies are identical to those introduced in Western case studies. Although the industrial SEZ is not seen in the Western model, the same technique is used to stimulate investment, which is the relevant point.

Although the specific reasons for the emergence of neoliberalism in Kazakhstan are very different than those that precipitated its existence in the West, a Kazakh version of neoliberalism does exist. The operation of a city as a business that facilitates private investment leads to the emergence of entrepreneurial urban governance and ultimately place marketing strategies (Harvey, 1989*b*). Entrepreneurial urban governance consists of three main components in the West; these components will be demonstrated to also exist in Astana (see below discussion).

#### *Public Private Partnership (PPPs)*

Neoliberal policies invite private interest into the urban environment and stimulate a new urban economy most often based upon tourism, sports, culture and entertainment facilities, all of which are considered spectacular sites of consumption. These types of developments inevitably change the image of place and the visual landscape. The primary way that private interest exerts its influence with respect to the built environment is through PPPs between business interests and the local municipality.

There are several different sources that have funded the construction of Astana; these include funding from the Republican (national) budget, Astana Akimat (city government), state-owned companies, extraction contracts that stipulate that money must be invested towards social development (building of Astana) and grants and gifts from Gulf States (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). As noted above, it is difficult to get fixed figures with respect to the manner in which the funding is divided between public and private. This is a common problem in Western case studies

as well, where figures that speak to the benefits and costs of urban revitalization and re-imaging campaigns are often exaggerated and the private interest remains the sole benefactor (Tranter & Lowes, 2007; see also Waitt, 1999). However, in Astana the issue is further complicated as Kazakhstan is considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world ranking 145<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries surveyed and its Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is at 2.2 out of 10, 10 representing a country without corruption ([www.transparency.org/news\\_room/in-focus/2008/cpi2008/cpi\\_2008\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in-focus/2008/cpi2008/cpi_2008_table)). Compare these figures to statistics in countries such as the United States, Great Britain and Canada, who score 7.3, 7.7 and 8.7 respectively. Therefore, although the government (both municipal and national) provides funding for the construction of Astana, there is a large portion of the investment in the city that comes from other sources (private sources both inside and outside the government), and it is difficult to determine the source of the funding. The majority of the foreign investment in Kazakhstan and Astana has been directed to specific projects (Olcott, 2002, p.10). Clearly, PPPs and profit have played and continue to play a large role in the development of Astana as a city and the projection of its image internationally.

One of the differences with respect to the PPPs in Astana and the West is that many of the sources of private funds come from the civic elites themselves, who have benefited financially from the process of privatization. What this means is that in Astana the roles of civic elite, booster and corporate elite have been combined, however profit remains the primary goal of the revitalization projects. Perhaps under the unique conditions in Astana profit becomes even more important with respect to the building of the image of a world-class city as the government does not want to lose money on two

fronts – as businessmen first and as government officials second. This “public-public” type partnership is seen in the Allen Parish community of New Orleans (Gotham & Haubert, 2007).

A second difference is that the joint roles of public and private in Astana make it even more difficult to determine the source of the money for the development of spectacular sites of consumption, as government officials would logically want to obscure the amount of personal profit they are making from the construction of Astana as a spectacular city. In addition, as a former parliamentarian commented, “Zoning developments within Astana were weak and corrupted by private interest who wanted more profit” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). This translates into lobbying for the development of the spectacular sites of consumption by private interests, as exemplified in all case studies in the West (Lowes, 2002; Gotham & Haubert, 2007; Gibson, 2007). The difference is that in Astana, the public government has less of a need to lobby the public – the masses due to the presence of a hegemonic culture.

The key point with respect to the relationship between PPPs and Astana is that they exist; that is to say, there is a very deliberate and institutionalized system of PPPs in the country and the city. Also, in Astana often the government represents both the public and the private enterprise. This is seen in structures such as the Pyramid; as one official observes, “Nobody will build a pyramid for nothing . . . private companies always reach for profit” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1). This is true, therefore, if the government paid for the construction of the Pyramid out of their own pocket, then how did they make the money back? The answer is through the admission

fee they charge to enter the private galleries that occupy the upper levels of the pyramid and of course the café/bar on the main floor. The government is operating in the same manner private interests in PPPs.

However, the newer multi-purpose sites of consumption that are being developed, such as Khan Shatyr and MEGA, are funded by purely private interest, that is non-government private interest. The lobbying for tenders to build Astana's next spectacular site of consumption or entertainment facility is really a game of Nazarbayev's favourites, as the website for the city of Astana proudly states how Nazarbayev "personally tested" ([http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page\\_id=531&lang=3](http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page_id=531&lang=3)) all large contractors involved in the construction of the objects of his new city. This is supported by another official who when asked how the decision was made with respect to the selection of Sir Norman Foster as the architect for the Pyramid, states: "I think that they just decided, I don't know about any competition" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1). Thus, although the tender process is promoted as being open, it is prohibitive to companies from countries not preferred by Nazarbayev. The system complies with "good bribes"; at least, this was the case in the initial phases of the construction of the city (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). It appears that there is a great deal of private interest that has infiltrated the public sphere in Astana, the effects of the private interest in the public space is compounded by a high level of corruption that either does not exist in the West or is better hidden.

As a trade and investment expert explains, open tenders often require specific statements from the interested company's government that certify that the company has paid its taxes and that it is an officially registered company. However, in many Western

countries companies are not registered with a federal bureau as they are in Kazakhstan, and therefore these foreign companies are often unable to provide the type of documentation that the government in Astana is asking from them in order to participate in the tender process (Personal communication, November 2008, Interviewee #8). These types of restrictions imply that the tender process is not really open; as for some countries it is impossible to meet the basic criteria set for investment. In addition, the requirements for companies are not accessible online, which further indicates that the process of investment in the build environment of Astana and Kazakhstan in general is not as open as the government promotes it to be, as not every company has an equal opportunity to lobby for a tender or even to gain information about what is required to participate in the tender process. The PPPs that emerge (outside of the private interest within the government) do so only because Nazarbayev, as the dominant actor, has permitted and initiated them, not because the project or the company is the most beneficial for the city or its citizens. This problem is compounded by the absence of proper research and assessment with respect to effects of the development.

### *Speculative Urban Planning*

The second characteristic of entrepreneurial urban governance is also evident in Astana, if only because there is no way to guarantee that the building of a spectacular city in the middle of the steppes in the hopes of projecting a world-class city image will be successful. “The entire construction of Astana was spontaneous” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #14) and therefore the outcome is unknown as there was no planning, no analysis of long-term financial effects (whether

they be positive or negative in nature). As Olcott (2002) argues there is a lack of reflection and vigorous debate within the press or the legislature.

Nazarbayev (2008) writes at length about how the capital investments in the construction of the city of Astana are for the future benefit of the people, the city and the Kazakh state. This type of justification is common throughout case studies in the West, exemplified in Gotham and Haubert's (2007) study of Allan Parish in New Orleans. In this case study, one sees a lobby campaign mounted to build a detention center in Oakdale. One of benefits of the detention center used in the promotion was that it would provide 600 jobs; however, in the end only 300 jobs were created due to budgetary constraints (Gotham & Haubert, 2007). This type of overselling related to lobbying and boosterism is quite common when you have speculative urban planning, which implies that the end result is not known. This is compounded due to the PPPs or as in the case of the detention centers a "public-public" partnership (similar to what occurs in Astana) where profit is the primary goal, as investors become the primary benefactors not the citizens (Gotham & Haubert, 2007, p.31).

Nazarbayev (2008) plays the role of primary booster with respect to the construction of Astana in a spectacular manner. He tells his people that all of their dreams will be realized through "taxes from the industrial enterprises and construction organizations carrying out the various commissions" and how new businesses will open "where people could find employment" (p.303). Many of these intended results have yet to be realized and the construction industry exemplifies this situation well. It is common practice that the majority of construction workers come from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; these migrant workers will work for much less than Kazakh workers

(Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). In addition, when the construction of the city first began, workers from other countries such as Armenia began coming to Astana in the hopes of finding work. Because of their dire situation, they were willing to work for less than local Kazakh workers (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #7). Thus, although it is true that the overall standard of living in Astana has improved, many of the jobs created through the construction of the city have gone to foreign workers and many Kazakhs face with the same situation they faced prior to the transfer of the capital. Therefore, the justification provided by Nazarbayev for the development and construction of spectacular sites of consumption and entertainment facilities parallels that in the West, exemplified by cities such as Glasgow (Paddison, 1993). The projected benefits far exceed the actual benefits for the local population, which also echoes the findings of case studies published on Western cities, if there is any profit to be made the primary recipients are the private investors and not the people.

The speculative nature of urban planning is related to Molotch and Logan's (2007) thesis which argues that urban elites and boosters use the city as an "urban growth machine" (p.50-52) stimulating the economy and facilitating capital accumulation. Zukin (1991) speaks to the same type of speculative, entrepreneurial style of urban governance that emerges through the focus upon spectacular sites of consumption in New York City. As indicated by Nazarbayev's (2008) statements, it is clear that one of his central intentions was to use the building of Astana as a way to create capital, but due to the level of corruption and crossing of lines between the public and the private in Astana, Nazarbayev and his inner circle were more concerned with maximizing their financial

interests and they used PPPs and speculative urban planning in order to achieve their goals.

### *Political Economy of Place*

Inside the Palace of Independence that sits on the Left Bank of the city is a large model of the completed city of Astana. There is a bridge that crosses over the model of the city and as one stands upon the bridge and overlooks the city the number of spectacular sites and sights of consumption and entertainment facilities are astounding. The entire city is a visual spectacle, a conglomeration of individual spectacular developments meant to project the image of a world-class city. As one looks over the model of the city, it appears that the production and construction of the physical landscape of Astana has been undertaken with the sole goal of “becoming one of the top capitals of the world” (Personal communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11). The commitment to the aesthetic related to the political economy of place over territory is reflected not only through the built environment, but also through the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has received more FDI per capita than any other post-Soviet state, yet has been slow to contribute to the overall improvement of the standard of living (Olcott, 2002, p.129). Some observers conclude that this trend is attributed to the majority of the funds from FDI being funneled into the construction of their new capital city – Astana; as one official summarizes “With the amount of money taken by Astana they’re could have been many cities built” (Personal communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1). The focus upon political economy of place over territory is central to the image construction and promotional discourse of the

city of Astana. Without the political economy of place, there would be no reason to visit the dusty town that has now become a spectacular city in the middle of the Steppe. The climate is horrendous and the land is inhospitable to agriculture, as the Soviets discovered through the Virgin Lands Project.

Nazarbayev has managed to convince the urban elites that only through the development of spectacular sights and sites will Astana live up to its reputation or the reputation and image that Nazarbayev wished to project with respect to the construction of his dream city. As one of the original architects of the city, prior to Kurokawa's time, explains:

Yes, we must build schools and hospitals, but we must also become a world-class city in order to attract investment and make money and only then we'll we have the money to develop those schools and other social programs, which are necessary. (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #5)

The focus of Astana's development is squarely placed upon spectacular sites such as the Pyramid, Bayterek Tower, Khan Shatyr and a plethora of other such structures to communicate the image of Astana as a world-class city to the visitor class. The image that the visitor perceives through the spectacular sights and sites of consumption and through the promotional discourse is of "Astana as a new destination. A wondrous landmark in the heart of Eurasia" (Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Promotional DVD], 2008). As illustrated through case studies in the West, spectacular spaces and structures communicate an image of place that speaks to the consumer in order to attract investment (Andrew, 2007; Judd & Fainstein, 1999a; Lowes, 2002, 2007; Paddison, 1993; Zukin, 1991, 1995).

As Lowes (2002), Waitt (1999) and Wilson (1996) conclude in their respective case studies, spectacular sporting structures and hallmark events such as the Olympics also have the image projection effect of spectacular architectural structures that are considered as belonging to the political economy of place. Thus, spectacular sporting venues and hallmark events also constitute part of Astana's effort to construct and project a spectacular image of place. Astana has already begun the construction of three new sporting venues on the outskirts of the city in order to meet their obligations as co-host for the 2011 Asia Games, the other host city is Almaty. It is germane to note that Almaty was the original host city for the 2011 Asia Games; however, Nazarbayev appealed to the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) to have the games split between the two cities - Almaty and Astana and won the appeal (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). It can be inferred that this appeal was undertaken in an effort to have a hallmark event further support the image of place that Astana is trying to project; that of world-class city.

The spectacular sporting venues that are being built operate in the same way as the spectacular structures with respect to image projection and their ability to attract visitors to the city. These facilities are extremely expensive to build, as exemplified by cities throughout North America, such as New York, Phoenix and Pittsburgh, where costs can escalate upwards of a billion dollars (Eisinger, 2000; see also Lowes, 2004). These stadiums or entertainment facilities are often paid for by the citizens through the taxes they pay the city. Paradoxically the citizens who pay for the construction of these entertainment facilities rarely get to use the space because of the cost involved in attending events. The primary purpose of these types of facilities is to attract the visitor

through image projection. Therefore, in Astana as in other cities, the elite hope to use the entertainment venues in combination with the hallmark event to showcase Astana as a world-class city capital, along with its other spectacular sights and sites of consumption, that tourists will visit when they come to the city.

In Astana the opinion of the elite with respect to the development of the political economy of territory can best be summarized by the response of an official from the Akimat's office to a question about what the city was doing to develop social programs. The official responded that: "Entertainment has developed quickly" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11) clearly indicating a failure to communicate that entertainment facilities are not social service, nor do they replace social services. The civic elite of the city are thus, primarily focused upon the development of the political economy of place, rather than territory.

The above examples all speak to the political economy of place. The example provided of the trenching of the Ishym River, where Nazarbayev envisioned sailboats on the river and therefore the process of deepening the Ishym River was immediately undertaken by the city illustrates quite well the focus upon the political economy of place rather than the political economy of territory in Astana. The trenching of the river is done purely to further develop the aesthetic attributes of the city in order to project the desired image of place to potential visitors. There are many other socially beneficial projects upon which the money spent trenching out the river could have been devoted to repairing the horrendous road conditions on the outskirts of the city, updating sewage and heating systems and building schools to name a few.

As the promotional discourse indicates, there is a firm “commitment to commercial, business, cultural and transportation goals” (Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Promotional DVD], 2008) in the city of Astana. Therefore, in addition to the city being constructed as a tourist attraction, there is an effort to market the city as a “magnate [*sic*] for ambitious, young professionals” (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). This is the same kind of image projection associated with the re-imaging campaign in Washington, D.C., considered by Gibson (2007) in his case study. Both in Astana and in Washington, D.C. there is a specific target market - the young middle class consumer with disposable income, - which is included in the definition of the visitor class. Astana following the mold of place marketing techniques as practiced in the West is not surprising, as scholars agree that interurban competition and the focus upon place marketing and the production of spectacular sights and sites of consumption often leads to a homogenization of place that is reproduced on a global level. Therefore, despite the belief by the urban elites and boosters that the political economy of place will highlight their city’s unique features, it truly serves to project the same bland images of place, irrespective of the rhetoric and promotional discourse. The elite in Astana believe that they are constructing a niche image of place due to their geographical location and due to the profusion of spectacular developments, unfortunately with respect to place marketing and the construction of a “place to play” (Judd & Fainstein, 1999b, p.261), a novel image of place is the exception not the rule.

*Place marketing and promotional discourse*

It has been established that profit driven characteristics and image creation associated with entrepreneurial urban governance and ultimately place marketing are discernable in Astana. It must now be ascertained whether the practices outlined above have led to an organized place marketing practice or whether the place marketing that exists in Astana is more impromptu in nature.

Our postmodern society speaks in the language of signs, symbols and images – what can be referred to as “the aesthetic realm”. This preoccupation with images in combination with the political economic trends outlined above, which have provided the space for private interest to insert itself into urban development have lead to the emergence not only of entrepreneurial urban governance, but also place marketing. Place marketing permits urban elites and civic boosters and those with vested interest in the urban environment to project a specific image of place to local and global audiences in order to garner financial profit.

Place marketing permits a city and its urban landscape to be interpreted as a product to be sold, and just as the image of a product is constructed to appeal to the needs of the consumer (for example, new electric cars for the environmentally friendly generation), the image of place associated with the urban space must be carefully constructed and tailored to the prospective customers’ wants and desires. Gibson (2007) effectively illustrates this point through his case study of Washington, D.C. and his analysis of the city’s “city living, d.c. style” (p.90), place marketing campaign. Through his case study, Gibson (2007) concludes that not only is there a specific consumer in mind with respect to re-imagining campaigns, but that characteristics embodied in the images that are projected to both a local and global audience through the promotional

discourse speak to that consumer, as does the visual landscape. This same pattern of a focused and consciously constructed image of place originating from a central location can be seen to exist in Astana. Place marketing campaigns focus upon the image of place projected through the built environment, as well as the quality of life that a city offers. The promotional discourse in Astana clearly speaks both these aspects of place marketing.

There are three central images, all related to the larger image of being viewed as a world-class city, that are evident in Astana's promotional discourse. The first of these is the image of Astana as the crossroad between Eastern and Western worlds. This theme is supported by the catch phrase used throughout the promotional DVDs and pamphlets reviewed for this thesis, that refer to Astana as "the Heart of Eurasia" (Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Brochure], 2008, p.1; see also Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Promotional DVD], 2008). The word *heart* implies Astana is a vital place in the world and essential to survival. The following word *Eurasia* implies Astana as a meeting point between two continents. Astana's prime geographical position, espoused throughout the promotional discourse, lists several services Astana has to offer the potential visitor. These services range from being a global communication hub with respect to facilitating commercial and economic flows from the Pacific Coast to Europe to offering a booming retail industry. This theme of being the heart of Eurasia is supported in another promotional DVD that claims "Astana knows no rival as a communication hub between Europe and Asia" (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). The message in the promotional discourse of Astana being perfectly located to facilitate international communication is not only a signifier of a world-class city, but is

also consistent with the larger image of place Astana is attempting to project, that of a world-class city.

The second theme used throughout the promotional discourse to signify a world-class city image for Astana, is that of the city being forward looking. The promotional booklets, DVDs, boosters and Nazarbayev all promote the image of Astana as a twenty-first century city “A bright and prosperous city ever going forward” (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). This implies that not only is Astana thriving today, but that it will continue to thrive in the future, providing visitors and investor’s alike great opportunities and amenities. Signs that say “Kazakhstan 2030” are present throughout the entire city of Astana as well as the country. This slogan is meant to be a reminder to the local population that there is a goal with respect to Astana’s and the country’s development. When asked what the slogan specifically refers to, an Akimat official responds that “Everything is going to be cool in 2030” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11), which is a vague response that leads the writer to believe that he is not really sure what the slogan means. The promotional discourse states that 2030 represents the dawn of Kazakhstan as a nation and Astana as a world-class city, once again reinforcing the foresight and future possibilities that Astana, as the symbol of Kazakhstan has to offer, not only to its citizens, but also to future citizens, visitors and investors.

The third and final theme in the promotional discourse that speaks to a world-class city image is that of Astana being a stand-in for the nation. This type of imagery has been used in Western cities such as Sydney, where Wilson (1996; see also Waitt, 1999) illustrates that the city is promoted in two ways through out the promotional

discourse – as a stand-in for the nation and as a world-class city providing world-class city amenities. Astana follows the archetype provided by cities such as Sydney with respect to its promotional discourse calling itself a “Symbol for the nation” and “The icon of Kazakhstan’s rapid development” (Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Promotional DVD], 2008). Other promotional material supports this theme, as do interviews and general observation, where it becomes apparent that Astana is meant to embody the Kazakh nation, which also serves as justification for the large amount of investment in its built environment. For example, in one single interview, Mayor Tasmagambetov mentions twice Astana’s role as a symbol for the nation: “I think Astana can and should act as a national idea united [*sic*] all the people of Kazakhstan” (Dzhananova, 2008*b*, p. 38), and the second statement comes at the end of the interview where the Mayor states that Astana is: “. . . the unquestionable testimony to and symbol of our country’s successful independence” (Dzhananova, 2008*b*, p.38). This message of Astana as a symbol for the nation is particularly relevant to the local audience, who are more likely to support the construction of place associated with Astana and the large amount of public (as well as the private investment required to do so) if they believe that it is how the outside world will perceive them and their country.

In his book President Nazerbayev (2008) emphasizes the promotional message common in place marketing and boosting aimed at the local audience; that the construction of a world-class image of place for Astana would provide economic benefits not only for the citizens of the city, but also for the citizens of the entire country. Nazarbayev claims that only costs involved with the transfer of the capital are those related to the moving of the capital and the development of the built environment, which

the people should be happy to support as “. . . these are investments into [*sic*] the future” (<http://www.astana10.com/page.php?lang=3>), and will only provide economic prosperity for the population.

Not only is the quality of life aspect of Astana’s image construction emphasized in the promotional discourse, but there is a recurring theme in speeches by urban elites such as Mayor Imangali Tasmagambetov, who refer to Astana as being “. . . one of the 30 most developed capitals in the world” (<http://www.astana10.com/page.php?lang=3>). This reference implies that not does Astana offer opportunities for young professionals looking for a career, as indicated above, but also several amenities for relaxation – sailing, cycling, rowing, state of the art sports facilities and five-star hotels. Therefore, just as Waitt (1999) illustrates in Sydney, the aesthetics of Astana’s built environment become commodities for consumption by the visitor and residents through oversimplification and amplification made possible by place marketing. It appears that Astana is indeed following a precise place marketing strategy, similar to those of the West to sell itself to potential investors and the visitor class. This is evidenced through the three central themes in the promotional discourse that mirror themes in the promotional discourse of case studies of Western cities. The civic elite and promotional discourse emphasize the city’s positive characteristics, while ignoring any negative ones.

### *Modern Place Marketing in Astana*

There are several trends that differentiate the place marketing that is occurring today to what has come before (that is, prior to the introduction of private interest into the urban space), which caused the urban landscape to be used as a source of profit. The first

trend is that the pace and variety of construction with respect to the built environment has increased (Eisinger, 2000). The simplest manner in which to demonstrate the pace of the spectacular development in Astana would be to take an aerial picture of the town Akmola in 1998 and compare it to an aerial picture of Astana today. However, with respect to scope of this thesis, that method is improbable; instead let us examine the figures and facts. As previously mentioned, ten years ago there was a ghost town where Astana is now located, whose population was close to 200,000. Now there is a city of over 600,000 people (Nazarbayev, 2008). In addition, ten years ago the entire left bank of the city was bare and now it is home to host of visual spectacles and entertainment facilities. As the promotional discourse states, in only ten years “Astana has undergone one of the world’s most grand scale development projects” (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). Even ten years after the initial phase of construction began, cranes and construction sites dot the landscape of the city as the construction of place continues; currently there are 1700 hundred cranes on Astana’s horizon operating in 650 different locations ([www.kzakhstanlive.com/2.aspx?sr=4](http://www.kzakhstanlive.com/2.aspx?sr=4)). It is clear that the pace of development in Astana has been aggressive in nature.

The variety of structures that have been built on the physical landscape of the city is rather impressive. In many Western case studies, one sees the emphasis placed upon one type of development, whether it be related to spectacular architecture, entertainment facilities, sporting facilities or revitalization of urban neighbourhoods. The diversity of the construction of the image of place associated with Astana’s place marketing campaign can in part be attributed to the variety of international architects who are responsible for the spectacular structures that dot the cityscape of Astana. These

architects include Sir Norman Foster, Kisho Kurokawa and most recently Manfredi Nicoletti, to name a few. The spectacular structures built by these architects represent cultural centers, sports facilities, shopping complexes and even a climate controlled indoor city under a glass tent. In 2009 alone, the city boasts that it will construct two bridges, twenty schools, a medical cluster, a 3500 seat concert hall, a three kilometer great water boulevard, and a Nokian tire plant; both Nissan and G.E. will complete their assembly facilities, and in 2010 a light rail metro will open

([www.kzakhstanlive.com/2.aspx?sr=4](http://www.kzakhstanlive.com/2.aspx?sr=4)). There is no better representation of the variety of physical structures than the above list. Astana has found something that differentiates it from other cities – it is the embodiment of placemaking through spectacular development. It is a city that has been raised from the middle of the arid steppe.

Eisinger's (2000) second point that differentiates today's place marketing refers to demographic and economic changes within society in general and the urban space specifically. Astana as a city typifies the shift in demography and economy to which Eisinger (2000) refers for several reasons. The population in Astana has increased greatly over the past ten years, as stated, and this growth in population has been accompanied by a large shift in the demographic make up of the city. The Akimat indicates that sixty percent of the population in Astana is between the ages of three and twenty-nine (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11), which is an extremely young population. The change in the demography of the city is attributed to several factors.

Prior to the transfer of the capital from Almaty to Astana, there was no reason for people to move to what was then Akmola. The town was not seen as a destination that

would improve ones' future prospects, as it had essentially been abandoned and represented the Soviet the past embodied in the failure of the Virgin Lands project. Since the transfer of the capital to Astana, the city has become more attractive to the young population living in the rural areas, as they buy into the opportunity presented to them through the promotional discourse. One government official indicates that up to forty-seven percent of the population in rural areas has migrated to Astana to get "their piece of the petrol money" (Personal Communication, November 2009, Interviewee #13), indicating their move to the city as a move for economic prosperity. As one twenty-three year old female resident of Almaty says when asked about what is next for her: "I must move to Astana, that is where the future is" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee # 16). Clearly the promotional discourse and the development of the physical landscape along spectacular lines, as well as the transfer of the capital, has worked. The young generation of Kazakhstan is flooding their new capital. Not only are the young moving to the capital, but "the originals [*inhabitants*] have more or less disappeared due to old age" (Personal Communication, November 2009, Interviewee #13) and an exponential increase in the cost of living. As one Kazakh official explains "The cost of living is so high – rent is so high - that people cannot afford to pay; they are faced with the situation that they cannot afford to live in their own city" (Personal communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1). Thus, the above trends have caused a large shift with respect to the demographic make-up of the city supporting the presence of a modern day place marketing practice in Astana.

As this thesis has illustrated, the economic environment in Astana has also undergone significant change complementing the shift in demography. The country as a

whole, represented by Astana, has transformed from a state-controlled, communist led purely production-based economy, where the concept of private-profit or ownership was completely foreign, to a country that is firmly entrenched in disorganized capitalism. Astana and Kazakhstan are now following several of the economic policies associated with neoliberalism and entrepreneurial urban governance, as indicated through mass privatization, deregulation and the introduction of SEZs.

Eisinger's (2000) third characteristic addresses a shift with respect to the target market of the development of the city. The urban government is no longer focused upon the needs of the city's residents, but rather upon the needs of the visitor (Eisinger, 2000). This shift in focus with respect to the targeted consumer is embodied in Harvey's (1989*b*) delineation between the political economy of territory and place, as well as the emergence of Zukin's (1995) symbolic economy. Both trends address the production of space and symbols within the urban environment for consumption by the consumer, rather than the citizen. As has already been established, the political economy of place and the development of a symbolic economy centered on spectacular sights and sites of consumption exist in Astana. Thus, in Astana the focus of Nazarbayev's urban elite and his civic boosters is squarely placed upon the visitor class, those with the requisite disposable income.

Eisinger's (2000) final point is that the scale of entertainment construction is significantly increased with current place marketing. As illustrated throughout the thesis, since the transfer of the capital of from Almaty to Astana, there has been non-stop entertainment construction in Astana. The epitome of this entertainment-focused development is embodied in Khan Shatyr (Royal Marquee), the newest spectacular site

and sight of consumption that seeks to project a world-class image to the visitor class. Khan Shatyr is, as the promotional material refers to it, “Xanadu-style pleasure dome” that is a fully functional, temperature-controlled indoor city for 5000 inhabitants that houses a concert hall, a beach, outdoor squares, luxury condos, sporting facilities and many shops (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). This is the jewel of all the spectacular entertainment facilities in Astana and represents the culmination of Nazarbayev’s focus upon the development of entertainment and services within the city.

Not only does Astana have a clear place marketing strategy, but the city and its dominant actor and his elite are following the place marketing model used by cities across North American, Great Britain and Australia in order to achieve the goal of projecting a world-class city image of place. Astana like any other place, in order to remain competitive in our globalized world is using place marketing to sell their city to the consumer, or rather to sell the image of Astana as a world-class city to the consumer.

This desire to construct the image of the city of Astana and its physical expression is led by President Nazarbayev, the central actor in the cities development, as well as by the new economic and political reality ushered in by independence from the Soviet Union. The case of Astana is an example of place marketing as it speaks to the construction of a built environment in its entirety, due to the fact that the city is being constructed from the ground up, whereas in Western cities there is usually only a portion of the city or particular building that is being revitalized or re-imaged. One exception to this complete construction of a city would be Brazil’s capital city – Brasilia, however aside from this commonality this thesis cannot comment on Brasilia and the presence of a place marketing strategy led by the urban elite, although this would be an interesting

research topic. Not only is Astana's built environment being constructed in order to project a world-class image of place, but its promotional discourse serves the same purpose, to project a world-class city image to attract investors. In Astana one is able to see the convergence of many different aspects of our postmodern society's place marketing strategies.

The above chapter has outlined in detail the mechanisms that provide the necessary environment for place marketing to emerge, as well as the specific characteristics of Western place marketing that can also be seen in Astana. The thesis will now examine some of the specific effects associated with the implementation of place marketing strategies in the urban environment to determine whether they are also found to be present in Astana.

## Chapter 5:

### *Expressions of Place Marketing*

#### *Gentrification*

The previous chapter illustrated how the conditions that facilitate the emergence of and the practices associated with place marketing in Western case studies present themselves in Astana. This chapter is concerned with examining gentrification, as a process related to place marketing that also involves social, physical and economic changes to the built environment (Smith, 1987; Lowes, 2002). In addition this chapter seeks to determine whether the gap between image and material reality often related to place marketing in Western case studies is present in Astana. Both gentrification and the "image/reality" gap have been written about extensively by scholars conducting case

studies of Western cities (Paddison, 1993; Rutheiser, 1996; Waitt, 1999; Lowes, 2002), and therefore the presence of an image-reality gap assists in demonstrating that place marketing as a practice with specific prerequisites, characteristics, processes and effects can exist outside of a Western context.

It has already been established that the left bank of the city of Astana has undergone a place marketing campaign that has constructed a city and an image of place from virtually nothing. This is the case as prior to the transfer of the capital there was no built environment or image of place associated with the left bank of the city as it was part of its natural surroundings, an arid steppe. However, the built environment of the right bank of Astana differs greatly to that of the left. The right bank of the city was the location of the original city - Akmola or Tselinograd that is now referred to as Astana. Thus, the right bank of the city has a pre-existing built environment that projected an image of place that differed from constructed image of place related to being a world-class city that the left bank of the city projects. This is because as has been established the built environment of a city can be interpreted as a readable text that is imbued with meaning by the culture that produced it, therefore, with respect to the right bank the images, the symbols and structures of place primarily spoke to the dominant ideology of the Soviet Era, as this is when Tselinograd enjoyed the highest level of investment in its built environment. In addition, the right bank of the city had been permitted to fall into disrepair.

The interests of Astana's urban elites and civic boosters, embodied in President Nazarbayev, depend on the revitalization of the right bank of Astana in order to create an image of place and ideology related to the built environment that is congruent with that of

the left bank – Astana as a world-class city. Gentrification is a common process associated with place marketing practices in case studies of Western cities, which are predominantly focused upon the re-imagining and revitalization of the inner city (Gibson, 2007). Thus, as Astana is attempting a similar revitalization and re-imagining process with the right bank of the city as Western cities have undertaken with respect to their inner cities the urban elite have turned to gentrification.

The process of gentrification is manifested by changes in the physical landscape of the urban space, which in turn convey meaning, similarly to spectacular sights and sites of consumption and entertainment facilities. Gentrification is a mechanism used to accumulate capital in an urban space in a post-industrial society and it speaks to the value of consumption rather than production with respect to land use (Ley, 1978). Therefore it is not only postmodern due to its focus upon consumption, but it is also related to place marketing with respect to the manner in which it operates because of its focus upon the landscape as a means to accumulate capital. In addition, as is the case with spectacular structures and spaces related to the implementation of place marketing strategies, gentrification results in distinct social, physical and economic changes to the physical landscape that serves to project a desired image of place as illustrated through Gibson's (2007) case study of Washington, D.C.

Astana's divergent economic, cultural, social and political history means that the history of capital investment with respect to built spaces of the urban landscape differs from Western cities. This is primarily attributed to two characteristics: (a) Astana is a brand new city, and (b) Astana only began participating in the capitalist system with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. These two characteristics are relevant because they

indicate that the depreciation of the inner city occurs in a slightly different manner in Western cities than in Astana, as in Astana there is not the history of investment in the built environment to create a cycle of appreciation and depreciation. Nevertheless, the concept of the rent gap and its stimulation of the process of gentrification are evident in Astana, however only on the right bank of the city. It seems that Ley's (1986) conclusion that there is "no singular dominant explanation of gentrification" (p. 527) is correct. The concept of the rent gap can be applied to the right bank of the city as that is where the original town of Akmola is located and thus, where one has an original investment in the built environment by the State which facilitates the possibility of depreciation and provides the necessary conditions for the materialization of gentrification.

As Smith's (1979) case study of Society Hill has shown, some neighbourhoods are more profitable to rehabilitate than others, generally these neighbourhoods are residential, located in the inner city and have suffered from neglect with respect to maintenance of amenities and infrastructure. This neglect leads to depreciation of economic value which creates a condition referred to as a rent gap, which is the difference between the potential rent level and the current or actual rent value. As Smith (1979) outlines through his production based explanation, gentrification occurs when the rent gap becomes wide enough the developers can purchase "shells" cheaply and can pay all the indented costs related to rehabilitation (builders' costs, interest on mortgage and construction loans) and are able to sell the end product for a profit (p.545).

Many early rehabilitation processes related to the rent gap and gentrification in the West were initiated by the state, this is a crucial point with respect to this thesis due to the central role President Nazarbayev and the state play in the construction of the image

of place with respect to Astana and the stimulation of gentrification of the right bank of the city. As Smith (1979) argues the state purchases properties in the depreciated inner city and returns them to developers. This enables them to ensure high returns for developers, as the state bears the cost of the last stages of capital devaluation, further stimulating investment in the built environment. The role of state-led gentrification has decreased significantly in the West, however in Astana the environment described by Smith (1979) still exists.

This pattern of neglect leading to depreciation and devaluation is evident on the right bank of the city of Astana. The lack of maintenance with respect to the old city is attributed to the failure of the Soviet Virgin Lands Project in the 1960s. After the failure of the project Akmola or Tselinograd (as it was referred to at the time) was essentially abandoned by the Soviet Union. This abandonment resulted in the city of Akmola – meaning “white tomb” being left to its own devices in the middle of the steppe (Robbins, 2007). When the capital was transferred to Akmola in 1994 the town was a vestige to the 1950s and the Soviet Era. The promotional discourse describes the right bank of the city as “A stock of slum, worn-out and outdated housing . . .” (Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Brochure], 2008, p.3), indicating that the right bank of Astana was in a similar state of dereliction as urban centre of cities in the West, exemplified by Smith’s (1979) study of Society Hill and Gibson’s (2007) study of Washington, D.C. prior to their revitalization through gentrification.

With the emergence of a rent gap on the right bank of the city President Nazarbayev implemented a policy of purchasing neglected or dilapidated houses from their owners in order to sell them to private investors who would tear them down and

rebuild. The re-imagining and revitalizing of the right bank and the attempt to create a new image of place associated with the world-class city image that the city was trying to project began. One man explains the government's policy, describing how he was approached by the government who told him that they wanted to purchase his house that was located on the right bank of the city. The house was very old and had been left to him by his grandmother and he says that everyone in his neighbourhood had the same experience. The government offered him 30 000 USD for the house and that amount combined with the little amount of money that he had saved was enough for him to purchase a new two bedroom house ten kilometers out of the city for 180 000 USD (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #6). Paddison's (1993) speaks to this moving of the poorer, working class segments of society to the outskirts of the city as being one of the effects of gentrification in his case study of Glasgow. The working class is forced to leave because they can no longer afford the cost of living in the urban center as the prices of houses, as well as rental prices have increased substantially in the newly gentrified areas.

The lot where the man's grandmother's house was located is now home to a mansion surrounded by six-foot walls and a gate. In fact, the entire neighbourhood has been gentrified along the same lines. These new mansions sell for millions of dollars (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #6 & [http://www.realestate.kz/eng/realestate/houses\\_sale\\_astana.html](http://www.realestate.kz/eng/realestate/houses_sale_astana.html)). Thus, the newly gentrified neighbourhood is being designed for a specific target market, one that can afford the mansions that have replaced the old style homes and cottages and can partake in the amenities offered by the city through the cities spectacular sights and sites of

consumption. This is similar to Gibson's (2007) conclusions with respect to the gentrification of Washington D.C. and its "city living, d.c. style" (p.90) promotional campaign that targeted young professional, suburban commuters and "empty-nesters" (p. 89), those segments of society with disposable income. This is the same target market in Astana, as Astana is a city for the future and young professionals (City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). In addition, one of the fundamental indicators of the existence of gentrification is the significant increase in the price of houses and rents. Even without knowing the specific figures one can assume from the above that not only are the profits margins for private investors substantial, but this profit is accompanied by a substantial increase in the cost of living in the neighbourhood indicated by displacement of the old population.

The right bank of the city of Astana is in the process of being "recycled" (Smith, 1979, p. 545) in line with the world-class city image that Astana is attempted to project as expressed through the development of sites and sights of consumption on the left bank, which speak to the consumer culture and a consumption based economy. In the end, the gentrified neighbourhoods that become part of the physical landscape of the city are commodities, just like the sights and sites of consumption associated with the place marketing occurring on the left bank of the city. The consumer consumes these commodities – the newly gentrified spaces, as they would spectacular sights and sites of consumption. This leads to the consumption based explanation for gentrification, which is present in Astana.

Ley (1986) is a proponent of the consumption orientated explanation for the emergence of gentrification, however he does not negate the production orientated

explanation. Ley (1986) argues that there are four main catalysts of gentrification: (a) Demographic change, (b) changes in the dynamics of the housing market, (c) the development of urban amenities, and (d) changes in the economic base. All four of these catalysts can be illustrated as being present in Astana at the time of the government's implementation its policy of gentrification. The demographic changes in Astana are undeniable and were stimulated by the transfer of the capital from Almaty. Despite the fact that some of the demographic changes have already been discussed in the previous chapter there are some additional points that serve to illustrate how the changes in the demography of Astana have encouraged the process of gentrification.

When the capital was transferred to Astana there was a large influx of people to Astana from all regions of the country and even from the surrounding countries. Many of these citizens were bureaucrats who were forced to relocate when Nazarbayev issued his decree otherwise they faced losing their jobs (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1), others were migrant workers and young professionals who came to Astana in the hopes of gainful employment and a bright future (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #7). Thus, there were many groups of society that had never lived in Astana before and were now coming to the city in large numbers.

As previously noted Astana's current population is very young, where as prior to the transfer of the capital the population of the city was much older. This is attributed to the fact that the city of Akmola had essentially been abandoned by the Soviets and therefore, the population remained relatively stagnant with the younger generations moving away to places like Almaty in the hopes of getting better jobs. This meant that the population that remained in the city was much older than the current population of

Astana. A former government official describes today's Astana as having "A very small and specific population . . . No such group that identifies themselves as locals" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13). In addition to the shift in the age of the average citizen of Astana there has been a change with respect to the ethnic majority of the city. Since 1989 the ethnic Kazakh population has risen from 17% to approximately 60% [statistic from 2007]

(<http://www.hope4astana.com/Astana/index.htm>). It is clear that Astana experienced large demographic changes with respect to the age of its citizens, their career orientation and their ethnicity, not to mention the population of the city has more than doubled since the transfer of the capital. These changes have stimulated different wants and needs.

One of the manners in which these new wants and needs are expressed is through the housing market. There was a large increase in demand for new houses and apartments for the new population of the city. Due to the demographic changes listed above the city was unable to provide the higher standard of living which the new citizens of Astana desired. Many of the new citizens of the city were government bureaucrats, who were accustomed to or expected a higher standard of living than the original population of the city of Akmola. As one bureaucrat says "We had very poor living conditions because there were no apartments, nothing. We were living together in the same apartment, without our families and then also some of them [*the new bureaucrats*], just you know sleep in their working places" (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1). Obviously, there was a certain level of unrest associated with these living conditions and demands for new housing to be built increased. The dynamics of the housing market were greatly affected because for the first time in decades there was a

demand for new houses and apartments.

Ley's (1986) third characteristic addresses the presence of new urban amenities within the urban center (this point is also developed by Lowes, 2002, Chapter 2). There can be no doubt that Astana experienced an exponential growth in urban amenities as the development of the left bank initiated a plethora of new services and consumption orientated amenities that were constructed to serve the needs of the visitor class and the new population. Prior to the transfer of the capital none of the cultural centers, restaurants, five-star hotels, entertainment facilities, shopping centers or spectacular structures that form the built environment of the left bank existed, not only that but the demand for these sights and sites of consumption were relatively limited due to the demography of the population of Akmola. The original population did not demand a new cultural center, an opera or museums, not to mention the spectacular developments. These urban amenities not only served the wants and needs of the new citizens, but they also attracted new citizens and visitors.

Ley's fourth characteristic speaks to shifts in the economic base of the urban center and is essentially a result of the first three characteristics. Not only did Kazakhstan and therefore Astana undergo sweeping changes to its economic system, but also to its economic base. Through place marketing and the projection of a world-class image of place, demographic changes and the development of a service-based economy through the construction of urban amenities the economic base of the city of Astana changed from one that was barely subsistent prior to the transfer of the capital to one that was based upon the service industry and one that was profiting from privatization and the entrepreneurial spirit.

The above four factors speak to the desires of the consumer driving the forces of gentrification. This is because as the new citizens infiltrate the urban center they place different demands upon the city, therefore in order to placate them, their demands must be met. This placation in combination with economic changes leads to the rehabilitation of the inner city and the influx of the middle-class and the displacement of poorer residents.

In Astana one can argue that both the production and consumption based explanations are relevant in explaining the appearance of gentrification. Whether one is to focus on the production based explanation or the consumption based explanation, there can be no doubt that gentrification has led to changes in the physical landscape of the right bank of the city. The urban landscape has been encoded with new meaning through the production of new images, symbols and structures, representing a new ideology and the projection of a new image of place that is more closely aligned with that of the world-class city for the visitor class projected by the left bank of the city.

### *Image versus Reality*

As has been established place marketing is a strategy used by urban elites and civic boosters to transform the physical landscape of a city so that it projects a particular image of place in order to garner capital. This image transformation and projection often associated with place marketing and its mechanisms tends to treat the city like any other product that is sold to a potential consumer in order to accumulate capital (Paddison, 1993). The product is streamlined and branded for easy consumption, just “like marketing a pair of jeans” (Gibson, 2007, p.90). As the case study of Astana

demonstrates the image of place projected both through the promotional discourse and the built environment is related to the amenities provided by a world-class city and is highly regulated by the urban elites and civic boosters who are being controlled by President Nazarbayev.

The specific themes within the promotional discourse in Astana speak to the city being the “Heart of Eurasia”, “A city of the future” and a “Stand in for the nation (Center of Stable Development of the City of Astana [Promotional DVD], 2008; City of Astana Akimat, Promotional DVD). In addition to these themes that speak to the visitor class, there is a fourth theme that speaks to the local population – the citizens - that is related to Astana’s ability to provide a high quality of life. This theme is directly related not only to the amenities and services the city provides, but also to the gentrification of the right bank of the city. The above themes are all related to the aesthetic quality of the city of Astana and speak about the city as a commodity to be consumed – the city has been commodified (Zukin, 1991, 1995). In addition, the themes amplify the positive characteristics and oversimplify the historical, cultural, political and social realities related to the city (Waite, 1999 & Wilson, 1996). This process has been shown through case studies in the West to not only lead to a homogenization of places on a global level, as previously indicated, but also to the development of an image-reality gap due to the negation of negative characteristics and the emphasis of an ever growing set of aesthetic attributes (Andrew, 2007; Paddison, 1993 & Waite, 1999). There are many ways in which the image-reality gap manifests itself in Astana.

Astana is a city where the glorification of spectacle and the role of power and profit have been maximized. In such an environment there is little attention given to the

needs and wants of the citizens with respect to the city's development, this is exemplified through the political economy of place rather than territory and through the emphasis upon sights and sites of consumption such as Bayterek Tower, the Pyramid and Khan Shatyr. The development of Astana and the images the city projects are primarily focused upon the aesthetic and the consumable qualities related to the image of place. The reality of place is very different. For instance, despite claims throughout the promotional discourse that Astana is the city of the future and a hub of communication the city lacks kindergartens for a large number of students due to the shift in the demographics of the city that have yet to be addressed by the municipality (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #11). How can Astana be the centre for the future and young generations if it does not have one of the most basic levels of infrastructure required to develop a stable and educated society?

With respect to infrastructure development there are still many improvements that the city requires. For example as one drives out of the urban center that consists of smoothly paved roads, the roads deteriorate rapidly. One is faced with roads that have not or paved since the Soviet era, with one-foot culverts between lanes and overpasses are half-built and jut out into mid-air leading nowhere. In addition, there are many places where the sewage systems have not been updated, especially on the right bank of the city, when one goes to the bathroom at a restaurant the bathroom often smells like a sewage dump. Mayor Tasmagambetov is quoted as saying in an interview that there is a major effort under way to "bring the right bank of the city into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with modern amenities such as subsoil heating, water transportation systems, as well as the basics, such as fixing the 150 elevators" (Dzhananova, 2008*b*, p.35-36), indicating that although

the city is attempting to project a spectacular world-class image there are many basic amenities and services that are not being provided to the citizens. The above illustrates that many of the themes in the promotional discourse, especially related to the high quality of life are not a reality for the local citizens, this is a similar point made by Paddison (1993) in his case study of Glasgow, where he concludes that “Glasgow’s Miles Better” (p.348) marketing slogan seems like a joke to the local population, who were not the beneficiaries of the improvements to the urban center. Similarly, in Astana as the working class citizens of the right bank are forced to the periphery of the city due to the gentrification of the urban centre. Therefore, not only are they unable to benefit from the re-imaging campaign, but they are being effectively hidden so that the urban elite avoids the possibility of them negatively affecting Astana’s newly created world-class city image of place. This dichotomy between the reality of place experienced by the citizens and the reality experienced by the visitor class is also an effect of gentrification in Astana, as well as in case studies of Western cities.

The left bank of the city – with its plethora of spectacular sights and sites of consumption – also perpetuates the image-reality gap. Nazarbayev (2008) writes and speaks about the economic benefits that the transfer and construction of the capital would have for the citizens not only of Astana but also of Kazakhstan as a whole. However, these economic benefits have yet to be realized for a large segment of the population both of Astana and Kazakhstan. Astana advertises itself as having a zero-unemployment rate (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #1) and although this may be the case the majority of jobs do not pay enough money for a family to subsist due to the steep increase in the cost of living; teachers, doctors and police officers who have been

relegated to the outskirts of their city exemplify this trend. Citizens with the above listed professions are barely able to sustain an acceptable standard of living, until the recent wage increase for street police officers, it was a relatively common practice for police officers to kill street dogs for meat for their families (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #13 & #2) as harsh and barbaric as this may sound. It is certainly not a characteristic of a twenty-first century city. As one local resident says “Your worst job in Canada would be our best” (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #6). The citizens are not experiencing the image of place promoted to the visitor class through the promotional discourse and the built environment.

Even the spectacular sights and sites of consumption are victims of the sterilized and homogenized images of place designed for the visitor class. Mosco (2007) in his study of Lower Manhattan and the construction of the Twin Towers addresses how often the image of a city, or particular neighbourhood is too messy and how the construction of a visual spectacle can help create the newly purified image of the city that is easily projected, marketed and consumed by the visitor class. Bayterek Tower symbolizes a similar type of negation of the reality represented by the place marketing associated with Astana, just as the Twin Towers did for New York City. Bayterek Tower is not only a visual spectacle; it is also the new symbol for the city of Astana. It is central to the promotional discourse and too the physical landscape as it communicates the image of a world-class city to the visitor class. However, it does not represent the complete history or culture associated with Astana, as it negates the Russian heritage of Kazakhstan and is more a glorification of the power related to the construction of place and President Nazarbayev’s legacy than anything else, especially with his golden hand print located at

the peak of the tower. It perpetuates the image of place, not the reality, as the city of Astana is much more than Bayterek Tower, it is much more than all of the spectacular structures, entertainment facilities and gentrified neighbourhoods.

The best synopsis of the image of place versus the reality of place is experienced through one's visit to the city. Leaving the five-star Radisson Hotel where each room has a multi-headed shower and a self-regulated heating system one passes several cottages that are remnants of the Russian Imperial era. There are citizens chopping wood outside their cottages in order to heat their cottages during the colder months as gas and electric heating are not yet available or are too expensive. This is the image-reality gap of Astana, the citizens have yet to experience what the visitor class takes for granted – the basic amenities of our twenty-first century society.

Perhaps the emergence of an image-reality gap is inevitable as one constructs an image of place through the built environment and promotional discourse designed to accumulate capital through the messages conveyed through the city's spaces. The reality rarely sells a product, for example would the mention of the bitterly cold winters, the sand storms, the shortage of heat and water in certain areas of the city sell the city to potential consumers? It appears that what is most important is the ability to speak to the needs and wants of the consumer and use the physical landscape of the city to accumulate capital. In an interview given by Jane Jacobs she addresses the difference between urban centers that have been permitted to develop organically versus those that have planned, using two streets of Philadelphia as examples. The first street is bustling with people, as well as social and economic interactions, while the second is virtually empty, but has "great vistas" (Wachtel, 2003, p.282). Perhaps this is what the planning and place

marketing associated with Astana, a non-organic city has created – spectacular vistas for the consumption of the visitor.

## Chapter 6:

### *Conclusion*

Based on the results of the empirical component of this thesis, it is clear that Astana is engaged in the practice of place marketing. This conclusion remains true both with respect to the city's built environment, as well as the accompanying promotional discourse. Therefore, the central research question of this thesis has been answered, and urban communication and place marketing literature can be applied to case studies outside of a Western frame of reference. Despite the similarities between the results of place marketing practices in cities in the West and the results in Astana there are some differences with respect to the manner in which place marketing has evolved and operates in Astana, which are important to delineate. These differences may indicate that the type of place marketing in Astana is slightly different and could perhaps be considered a sub-species of place marketing.

One of the central similarities between Astana and previous case studies reported in the literature is that Astana is heavily imbued with a specific ideology of place

expressed through the landscape and associated with the production of signs, images, and symbols related to President Nazarbayev's personal vision for his city and his country. Nazarbayev's central role in the construction of a specific image of place related to the projection of a world-class city image is central to the concept of actors in the urban environment. It is with respect to the actors involved in the process of place marketing that a difference is apparent between Astana and the results of previous case studies. In Astana there is only one urban elite, one dominant actor represented by President Nazarbayev who makes all of the decisions and then delegates to his favourites in lower levels of government. Not even the Mayor of Astana has a direct role to play in the construction of the image of place associated with his city. The city of Astana is Nazarbayev's singular vision, whereas in previous case studies the central actors are comprised of a group of powerful individuals who join together in constructing a specific image of place (Lowes, 2002; Rutheiser, 1996; Zukin, 1991, 1995).

As indicated Astana's political-economic history is founded upon communism rather than capitalism and dictatorship rather than democracy, regardless of this central difference in political-economic development between Astana and previous case studies one sees the introduction of economic policies in Kazakhstan that parallel the neoliberal economic policies introduced throughout the West during the 1970s, which served to facilitated the emergence of entrepreneurial urban governance. The introduction of neoliberal economic policies in Astana mirrored the result seen in cities such as Vancouver, Baltimore, New York and Glasgow and provided the space for a distinctly entrepreneurial urban system of governance to emerged that had the political economy of place, speculative urban planning and PPPs as its pillars.

The central difference in Astana with respect to entrepreneurial urban governance is that the level of corruption and emphasis upon profit with respect to the construction of the built environment is even greater than in the West. This difference can in part be attributed to the lack of separation between public and private interests in the development of the urban landscape. In Astana there are public officials who have vast private holdings (including Nazarbayev himself) who invest in the development of the urban landscape and therefore the line between civic duty and personal profit becomes even more blurred. Perhaps Astana is analogous the oil rich Arab states addressed by Harvey (2008) as they have also experienced higher levels of corruption through their placemaking efforts, which Harvey (2008) attributes to their vast natural resources. Kazakhstan also possesses vast natural resources and oil reserves and in 2002 Kazakhstan had the goal of becoming “. . . another Saudi Arabia in the next two decades” (Olcott, 2002, p.3). Therefore, it appears that Harvey’s (2008) conclusion with respect to the Arab states placemaking efforts and the higher levels of corruption can also be applied to Astana.

As was concluded Astana’s promotional discourse, like the promotional discourse analyzed in case studies of Western cities emphasizes the amenities and the high quality of life the city is able offer its residence as well as visitors. Thus, the promotional discourse is focused upon both a local and global audience (Lowes, 2002). The themes represented in the promotional discourse are associated with the production of the urban landscape along spectacular lines, focusing upon aesthetic qualities of life and the built environment. The focus upon the aesthetic qualities of the city, which includes not only structures and spaces of the cityscape, but the services that the city is able to provide

ultimately leads to the commodification of place - a central concept of place marketing as expressed in the results of case studies of Western cities (Judd & Fainstein, 1999a, 1999b; see also Zukin, 1991, 1995).

In Astana one witnesses the construction of place, rather than the revitalization or re-imaging of place. This is especially true with respect to the left bank of the city, which fifteen years ago was sprawling steppe and today is home to a spectacular city that is attempting to project a world-class city image. However, the development of the built environment of the left bank of the city is contrasted with the development of the right bank of the city where one sees the materialization of one of place marketing's most common mechanisms - gentrification. Gentrification more so than other aspects of place marketing speaks to the quality of life that a city has to offer new residents, in addition gentrification only expresses itself in areas that are undergoing or have undergone a process of revitalization. As has been illustrated through analysis the right bank of the city is where the original Soviet town of Akmola was located and thus with the transfer of the capital the right bank of the city has undergone a process of gentrification. The gentrification of the right bank of the city has resulted in the displacement of the original, lower income population of the city, mirroring the results in case studies of Western cities such as New Orleans, Vancouver and Glasgow (Ley, 1987; Paddison, 1993; Gibson, 2007).

The use of the urban landscape to create and project a world-class city image of place in order to attract investment often leads to the appearance of an image-reality gap. As the analysis of Astana has illustrated despite the appearance of certain benefits, in general the citizens of Astana are not able to relate to the new world-class image of place

that the city projects, nor do they benefit from the attendant amenities. In fact, for the citizens of Astana, the world-class city image that is projected through the cities numerous spectacular developments, entertainment facilities and promotional discourse is really a Potemkin village – an illusion. Now that the conclusions of the research have been summarized the reader is left to consider: What does it mean? What does the case study of Astana add to scholarship generally, and to urban communication specifically as a field of study?

Astana as a city has been developed more along the lines of Las Vegas or even Disneyland - a consumption-based spatial complex for entertainment purposes (Zukin, 1991). Astana not only addresses the consumption based projects common in place marketing strategies, but also to the development of spectacular structures and spaces related to culture, sports, tourism and entertainment. The thesis concludes that overall Astana fits very closely into Hannigan's (1998) model of a Fantasy City, after all is Astana not the dream or fantasy of President Nazarbayev?

There are six central characteristics that Hannigan (1998) uses to define what he refers to as a *Fantasy City* and each characteristic expresses itself in Astana. The first characteristic is that the city be "theme-o-centric" (p.3) which means that there is an ambiance created around a distinctive geographical locale, historical period or type of cultural activity. The second characteristic of the fantasy city is that the city be "branded" (p.3), therefore, it not only provides consumer satisfaction, but it sells licensed merchandise onsite. This branding can also be achieved through location based entertainment venues. The third characteristic outlined by Hannigan (1998) dictates that the city operates day and night; like Las Vegas, the city is encouraged to have after dark

activities from nightclubs to late night entertainment destinations. The fourth characteristic of the fantasy city is that the city is “modular” (p.4), meaning that the type of physical structures are not changing, but their arrangement upon the physical landscape does vary from place to place, meaning there is little or no zoning practiced within the city’s limits. The fifth characteristic is that the city is “solipsistic” (p.4) isolated from the surrounding neighbourhoods physically, economically and culturally. This characteristic of the fantasy city speaks to Boyer’s (1993) city of illusion, as it does not reflect the reality of place. The sixth and final characteristic is that the city is postmodern and therefore, constructed around stimulation of the senses, virtual reality and the thrill of spectacle (Hannigan, 1998).

Astana is built around the three central themes that were highlighted in the analysis of the promotional discourse, all of which speak to the historical theme of Kazakhstan becoming a great nation with a great capital city. Two of the themes are vitally important: The first is that of being the center of Eurasia and thus linking the two great civilizations of Europe and Asia, and the second central theme is that Astana is the heart of the great Fatherland (Kazakhstan) and a stand-in for the nation.

The city of Astana may not be branded in the traditional sense through corporations that sponsor sports stadiums, however, the government’s role in the construction of these spectacular sights and sites of consumption is extremely central and so is the money that comes from the oil and gas industry. In addition, there are several restrictions in place with respect to the colour of the façade of buildings that stipulate that structures must be bright and many reflect the national colours of Kazakhstan: yellow and blue (Personal Communication, November 2008, Interviewee #5). In addition, there is a

clear focus upon entertainment-based structures within the city. Astana's brand is itself – the government of Kazakhstan has aggressively gone about branding their city, just like any corporation brands their latest stadium, take for example the Corel Centre.

Astana operates day and night and all services and amenities are available to the consumer whenever he or she may desire them. In addition, there are several nightclubs that are open until daylight and remain open throughout the day to serve the consumer, the visitor to the city. Astana is the ultimate modular city, an urban entertainment destination where one can find every type of entertainment facility from five-star hotels to themed restaurants, such as Russian and Uzbek restaurants that regale guests with traditional food and music from those regions, as well as servers dressed in traditional costumes. In addition, the city is home to spectacular sites and sights of consumption embodied in architectural wonders.

Astana is truly a city of illusion, “A green oasis in the center of a huge steppe” ([www.astana10.com/page.php?page\\_id=531&lang=3](http://www.astana10.com/page.php?page_id=531&lang=3)), geographically isolated and isolated in its physical, economic and cultural form from neighbouring cities and even suburbs. The city truly is solipsistic in nature ignoring the realities of poverty and unemployment that exist outside of the city's limits. The city itself is surrounded by dirt roads, not newly paved roads exist in the center of the city, and cottages that were built in the nineteenth century whose inhabitants chop wood to heat their homes to survive the harsh winter months, as was addressed in the discussion of the image-reality gap at the end of the fifth chapter of the thesis.

Hannigan's sixth characteristic speaks to the fantasy city and how it is “postmodern” (p.4) and although the first chapter discusses Astana's classification as a

postmodern city, it is of value to discuss that Astana truly is a city that is focused upon the thrill of the spectacle where the image takes priority over discursive forms with respect to the development of the urban landscape. There can be no doubt that due to the number of spectacular developments that range from symbols for the city to climate controlled indoor environments there is a certain “Magic Kingdom” (Hannigan, 1998, p.4) aspect to the city of Astana. For who could believe, without seeing and experiencing that this city actually exists in the middle of the Central Asian steppe? Nevertheless, through the implementation of a place marketing strategy and the construction and promotion of the image of a world-class city a “fantasy city” (Hannigan, 1998, p.3) has emerged in the middle of the Eurasian steppes.

It would be interesting to conduct more research with respect to other cities that have similar economic, political, social and cultural histories to Kazakhstan, even other cities within the Central Asian region in order to determine whether the concept of place marketing in these places is more closely tied to placemaking that one sees emerging in Astana rather than to place re-imaging and revitalization seen in the majority of case studies of Western cities. Also, further research is warranted to determine whether Astana is an individual case or could be included into a new archetype of place marketing with a singular actor, high-level of public-public partnership and little civic opposition.

## Appendix A:



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