

What the “new Istanbul” shaped by capital makes one think...

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Abstract

Istanbul, which has tried to be administered without high scale plans, strategic acceptance and principles, so as to remain away from “scientific” and “objective” implementations in the name of planning, is today faced with significant problems and threats. The relationships brought forward as a consequence of globalization as well as the fact that the city has been directed in an unconditional manner by capital has led to a city that completely lacks direction to be given by balanced and principle based planning due to unconscious urban management. Although attempts were made to initiate quite significant planning efforts within this process, the fact that central attitude and planning had been unable to assume a legitimate role had always been the most important obstacle for balanced and planned development. In particular, the “large”, “autonomous” and “fragmented” projects observed lately are another product or consequence of this crooked system. These “giant” and “arrogant” projects produced by local or central governments in different strategic points of the city are quite dangerous and capital focused approaches will change the appearance of the city at the expense of the alienation of the city to itself. Such projects, for which only capital is a determinant factor, have been the most important factors shaping Istanbul in the last period.

Keywords: Istanbul, development focused on capital, point plan decisions, large projects and Istanbul, urban regeneration projects and Istanbul, New Istanbul Vision.

1 Introduction

Following the general and local elections held in 2004, the central government and the local government of Istanbul have been under the administration of the



same party with a rightist tendency. The fact that the central government and Istanbul are in the same political conjuncture was perceived as an advantage at the beginning. The opinion that this partnership would lead to favorable consequences in terms of fast decisions, regular investments and the provision of effective and productive services was dominant at the beginning. However, during the implementation process of more than two years, it has been understood that this did not yield positive results as expected, especially for Istanbul and the development of Istanbul in a manner overlapping with balanced, principle based and scientific agreement.

On the one hand, quite significant attempts were made over the last 2.5 years for Istanbul in terms of planning. The foundation of the “Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Office” ranks first among them. This office incorporating within its structure a planner and technical experts in their area of interest, with their number exceeding 100, initiated a very intensive work for the preparation of planning and inventory, analysis and assessment of Istanbul and continued its studies with the support of valuable academicians from universities. Comprehensive statistical analysis of socio-cultural and physical structure, which had been significantly missing, was conducted and efforts were made with regard to the “Strategic Plan” of the city. However, it was not easy to interpret the dynamics and potentials of Istanbul with its population exceeding 12 million and 74 first level municipalities, and to come up with scenarios for the future. In particular, problems related to coordination established between first level municipalities increased and gradually led to discontinuity, confusion of authority in planning and led to a period in which decisions were made individually and not conforming to principles such as “subsidiarity” and especially with the processes of “participation”. Certain concepts, in particular, were emphasized during this process. The concepts of “Urban Regeneration”, “Urban design” and point based projects produced for these concepts are also among them and have sometimes been brought to the agenda as a phenomenon that had been misinterpreted many times by different circles.

These attitudes and the very dominant and autonomous planning decisions were formed most of the time in a manner independent from the Metropolitan planning office, and without informing it. This very serious lack of coordination led to the “stillbirth” of the Istanbul Strategic Plan, for which there had been many hopes.

2 The “new Istanbul” vision abandoned to the limitless approvals of capital

Istanbul has entered into a significant process with its organizational scheme in a rapid process of reorganization, changing administrative borders and a legal administrative basis and its new planning teams having been established. The revisions made in the country in the legal sense and especially in the area of public administration and planning were perceived at the beginning as the messenger of a series of new innovations. However, a perspective, which is also very dangerous, has become dominant in the administrative and planning areas



of Istanbul. Planning and administering this difficult city with its indefinable multiple dynamics, complex and illegal to a great extent, is very difficult. However, wrong methods, wrong process planning and a series of actions without principle also prevent actions and efforts that would be successful and beneficial in the long term. A few basic concepts make the problem bigger and make it difficult to come up with solutions. These may be classified under the following headings from the point of local governments and authorities.

1. "Hasty" and "palliative" perspectives, administrative tools and goals restricted with political periods,
2. Populist attitudes,
3. Local authorities with insufficient experience and expertise,
4. The tendency to attract the investor to the city in a manner without any principle,
5. Establishing planning, implementation and control processes that do not suit scientific and professional approvals and ethics.

In this sense, many "values of essence" in the city are damaged. These decisions, which might lead to the extinction of values that could not be replaced, most of the time do not suit principles of planning and urbanization. The most striking three examples of these shall be examined in this study.

The first is the *Galata Port Project*, the second the *Haydarpasa Railway Station and World Trade Center and the Cruiser Port Project* and the third the *Dubai Towers*. All three of these projects are located at quite important and strategic points of Istanbul and have been included in the planning process of the city in a "de facto" manner as "autonomous" decisions that do not suit the approval of the city and has received reaction from almost all NGOs and professional chambers. These projects, introduced by the central government and the administration of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality as prestigious projects for the city, in fact bear contents and processes that damage the dynamics of the potential and identity of the city.

2.1 Galata Port project

The Galata Port, which had always been a significant destination in the city since the 15th century on the European continent of the city, has been an important warehouse/entrepot for the city since the beginning of the 19th century and has assumed the function of a central port for international marine transportation. As cargo transportation switched gradually from Galata to the Haydarpasa Port on the Asian continent, it became the only point of halt for large passenger cruise vessels. The Galata Region was privatized in 2005 after its declaration as a private tourism area and the projects, having been prepared within this framework, also brought along with it big discussions (Fig. 1). This area, where the city will especially meet water on the European side, was transformed into projects developed through privileges granted to international capital groups with autonomous decisions.

This project, which is against both the constitution and the principles of planning, also bears numerous technical drawbacks.



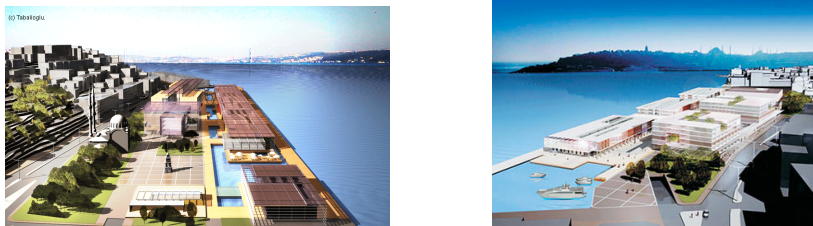


Figure 1: Galata Port project.

In particular, the fact that the area concerned has been an area of infilling, acquired from the sea, has not been taken into consideration. No additional transportation solutions or projects were prepared to meet the intensity that would take place in the region and the visitors that would be attracted as a consequence of the functions proposed (shopping center, accommodation, housing, cultural facilities, trade). The same problem exists for the additional burden to be imposed on the infrastructure of the region (waste water, drinking water, electricity, natural gas etc.). There is no strengthening with regard to a new system or the rehabilitation of the old system. The investment company has not been found responsible for the infrastructure projects that have not been calculated during the project, which have then become indispensable. This means that the investment concerned shall be made by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the Turkish Government. These investments, based on the investments of the population, will be an additional burden on the state and the population is granting a subsidy to the investor in a sense [1]. The region with its existing texture is an area experiencing intensive traffic and transportation problems in the quiet crowded and old urban texture. Also the entry to and exit from the construction area and the transportation of the work machines necessary for the construction areas proposed is almost impossible and imposes an unacceptable threat to the local community. In a manner, which is independent from all those points referred to above, the need for “green areas” is at a maximum level and, in this respect, the idea that the use of the port should be public should be defended and the inclusion of “prestige residence” areas in the project is also among the most objectionable points of the project.

2.2 Haydarpasa Railway Station and World Trade Center and Cruiser Port Project

The Haydarpasa Port region, located on the Asian side and on a coastal band that is significant for the marine transportation of the city, also has an important value as a railway, marine transportation transfer point. This significance becomes stronger when considering the similar role that it undertook in history. It almost embraces the sea with the Haydarpasa Railway Station building, which is an indispensable silhouette for the unmatched coastal panorama of Istanbul and it almost wraps up the city with the “Historical Peninsula”/old town located right across from it on the other side. There is no doubt that in this area, which

might need new arrangements and infrastructure projects, there have been a series of decisions adopted following a series of wrong planning decisions and processes, which have not been approved by the parties concerned; however their implementation cannot be stopped. The project covers an area of approximately 1.000.000 m² (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Haydarpasa Railway Station and World Trade Center and Cruiser Port Project.

In the project, which has been prepared according to the model of construct-operate-assign, the areas will be leased to the investors for a period of 49 years and 7 skyscrapers, 7 five star hotels, sports and recreation facilities and congress departments, yacht ports and residences representing the 7 hills of Istanbul are included [2].

It was observed that the majority of the project area concerned had been in an area that is not suitable for settlement and that detailed geological analysis has not been conducted. This highlights the great danger that exists along the coastal line of a city like Istanbul, with a very high earthquake risk. No analytical studies have been conducted for such a work [3]. Functions and designs preventing the use of the coast by the public violating the Coastal Code were proposed. Integration with the existing transportation systems has not been achieved, continuity of main transportation axes has not been provided, peripheral data have been disregarded and integration could not be achieved. The issue of Leave Free led to uncertainty about the height of the project in the 3rd dimension.

2.3 Dubai Towers

Another example of a project with such great mistakes are the towers known as the “Dubai Towers” in the Turkish Public, which came into existence with the help of foreign capital (Fig. 3). In this project, which will be realized as a business and residence center by Dubai International Properties (DIP), there will be 5 star hotels, office areas, recreation and shopping centers. In the project, which has been planned to be finished in 2008, the height of the towers are intended to be 300 meters [4].

This project, planned to be located at the continuation of the new “CBD” axis on the European side, has attracted a lot of criticism with the slogan that it entered the market with a series of technical mistakes. The project, with an approximate cost of 550 million Dollars, which has been introduced with the slogan of “We are coming to change your Shopping Culture”, is evaluated as a project with data that will lead to problems in many different dimensions. The

most important factor that made the local authorities and the central government enthusiastic about this investment has been the fact that the investors from Dubai have offered to direct further investments into the city corresponding to approximately 9 times more than the investment concerned, after the construction of the towers [5].



Figure 3: Dubai Towers.

The investment group claimed that they would create a “symbol” for Istanbul along with this giant project and the Turkish authorities were pleased with this offer. They forgot that the city that they had been talking about had had a past of 2500 years and that it incorporated unmatched natural and cultural symbols in all parts; rather they started to have a very enthusiastic attitude towards these “artificial images”.

3 The common problems in all three projects presented as the vision projects of Istanbul

- The decisions of intensity do not match the higher planning decisions and segmental zoning and construction rights are granted to those regions of the city,
- The processes of planning, decision and implementation were conducted in an order that do not match professional acceptance and ethics processes, and the necessary legal approval processes have not been completed,
- In the projects brought up for the “Benefit of Society” there are no spatial reflections for this process and decision, and there are also decisions that are in contradiction with this overall decision, such as the announcement of coastal areas as “housing” areas.
- The use of coastal areas are not opened sufficiently for social use,
- Inclusion of definitions that do not conform to the planned construction technique,

- Factors, silhouettes and heights will be formed that shall have a very adverse effect on the silhouette of the city and the infrastructure,
- The infrastructure, transportation plan and projects for absorption of the intensity to be created will not be analyzed,
- A construction type not respecting the historical identity is being encouraged,

These can be cited as the major criticisms common for all three project areas.

4 How do international agreements interpret these arrangements within the process of integration to the European Union?

When these projects are interpreted from the perspective of international agreements that Turkey has signed and is obliged to conform to, and when the articles concerned and profiles of the projects are compared, the following inferences can be made.

First of all, one can approach the subject within the framework of “*European Urban Condition*”. This condition, accepted in the year 1992, reads as follows in the articles concerned: “...The liveliness of a city is dependent on balanced urban settlement models and the preservation of the settlement characteristics of the city.” With this principle, local governments are given the responsibility to regenerate and rehabilitate urban centers to provide sustainability. Similarly, with the principles mentioned in part four under the heading ‘Architectural Look at Cities’, it is emphasized that urban heritage will constitute a point of reference for future generations, so a lot of responsibility lies with the local authorities for the preservation and sustainability of this heritage and that urban economic revival has a significant role for preservation. [6]

Another significant agreement, which can constitute a criterion for all the three projects, is “*Charter of European Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability – The Aalborg Charter*” adopted in accordance with the decisions of the Rio Summit in 1994 [7]. With this agreement, which is among one of the most important steps for the establishment of sustainable cities, it was agreed that European cities had been the guardians of tradition, culture and cultural heritage and that they had the responsibility to preserve and protect this heritage, to pass it on to the future and that the local authorities had significant duties to reach this goal.

In addition to these agreements, “*The Agreement for the Preservation of European Architectural Heritage*” suggesting the development of basic common policies for the preservation of the joint architectural heritage of Europe, and “*Sustainable Cities Report, 1996*” prepared between 1993 and 1996, defending and explaining the concept of sustainability in urban areas, and the contents of the projects referred to above are not in line with each other [8]. All three of the projects indicate significant risks for the sustainability of the city culture, integration with its natural structure, sustainability and balanced development of architectural heritage and establishment of healthy and balanced city centers [9].



In particular, the identity of these projects, which are shaped in a manner of preferential treatment to privileged income groups with speculative developments that replaced public common benefits, do not conform with the valuable “traces” of the history of the city for 2500 years, which has hosted many civilizations and incorporates many features about them.

5 Conclusion

These projects, which are occurring in very valuable parts of the city both by the central government and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality with the purpose of “marketing the city” and “pulling foreign capital into the city”, were designed and proposed in a manner that is in contradiction with legal systems, planning, approval and implementation processes, principles and norms of planning and urbanization, public expectations and benefits and professional ethics. They disregard the values of the city at once, do not suit with the identity of Istanbul and disregard environmental factors such as transportation relations, environmental functions, environmental factors etc.

There is no doubt that such an important city definitely needs the functional areas referred to in the three projects cited above. When we approach the matter from another perspective, we can conclude that “regeneration”, “renewal”, “gaining new functions” and/or “production once again” are the correct planning tools for the parts of the city that have lost their function in time, have become dilapidated and are unable to meet the needs for today.

However, the problem here is the mentality established on the perspective of adopting point-based decisions without integrating them within the city as a whole and with the Strategic Plan, without respecting the values of the city, which are its essence, and assuming that opening the city to foreign capital in an “unconditional” manner means being a “world city”, therefore refusing all the established systems of the city, including its participation and governance channels.

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