

Site management process and urban renewal in Istanbul: Historical Peninsula

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Abstract

Site management has become a matter standing out in our country in recent years. The Historical Peninsula, the most remarkable site with the ongoing implementations in this process was proclaimed a Historic Site by the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Board in 1995. The Historical Peninsula, having an important role in the Istanbul Metropolitan Area, was subjected to new organization by Law No. 5226 “Amendment to Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Law and Various Other Laws” which was enacted in 2004. Accordingly, new concepts including “Management Area”, “Management Plan” and “Conservation, Implementation, Audit Bureau” were defined by the law. Parallel to this restructuring process, the entire area of the Historical Peninsula was proclaimed for renovation, pursuant to Law No. 5366 on the ‘Preservation by Renovation and Utilization by Revitalizing of Deteriorated Immovable Historical and Cultural Properties’ which came into force in 2005, and a number of renovation projects were launched. One of the main problems at the Historical Peninsula is the concurrent execution of a large number of plans and projects at the site in varying scales. This phenomenon challenges the management of the site. The Master Zoning Plan for the Conservation of the Historical Peninsula, which is still pending for enactment, is a current gap that needs to be filled within this process, while uncoordinated renovation projects continue to have a dominant impact over the area, along with the lack of plans and the continuing site management process.

In this study, the ongoing planning and urban renewal efforts at the Historical Peninsula will be discussed in conjunction, along with an attempt to analyze the



implementations, the relationship between these processes and site management will be questioned.

Keywords: Istanbul, Historical Peninsula, site management, urban renewal, urban conservation, planning management process.

1 Introduction

As a privileged city to serve as the capital to the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, Istanbul has always been the center of interest due to the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of its location, amidst the Black Sea, the Balkans, Anatolia and the Mediterranean. As a transcontinental city at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Istanbul is a global city. The first settlements in Istanbul dates back 300 thousand years, while the city has a 3 millennium long urban history and served as a capital for almost 1600 years, the city has hosted several civilizations and cultures over the ages, and the long history of coexistence of different religions, languages and nations converted the city into a unique mosaic of diversities. Being one of the few cities in the world which left behind epochs as a power center and a node for every aspect of civilization and Istanbul has been and still is a global metropolis from past to present. The Historical Peninsula which will be discussed in this paper is actually the headland extending from Sarayburnu (Seraglio Point) to the enclosing city walls at back, between Marmara and the Golden Horn, which gave birth and served as the capital to several great empires along the world history. The entire city of Istanbul has taken over the name of this small enclosure, which covers a 3% portion of the city. The Historical Peninsula surrounded by city walls and seaward ramparts host a unique mosaic of cultural heritage of civilizations, piled on top of each other layer by layer. The Historical Peninsula is one of the very few locations which host an immense and diverse cultural heritage that one can not easily see in any corner of the world. Today the site still maintains these assets as in the past.

The four chief sections of the headland are; The Archaeological Park on the Historical Peninsula; Süleymaniye Quarter hosting the bazaars and the surrounding local settlements, Zeyrek Quarter hosting the Church of Christ Pantokrator (today Zeyrek Mosque) and the area hosting the remains of abandoned Palace of Blachernae extending along both sides of the Theodosian Wall. This historic capital is adorned with numerous unparalleled monumental structures including, many architecture works of the Imperial period, Sultanahmet Mosque (The Blue Mosque), Sokullu Mehmet Paşa Mosque, Yeni Cami (Mosque of the Valide Sultan) from the 17th Century, Topkapı Palace a 15th century as a waterside palace with a compound of 700,000 square meters, Hippodrome of Constantine, the Valens Aqueduct, Hagia Sophia Cathedral, St. Irene, Justinian St. Sergius and Bacchus churches, Church of Christ Pantokrator ordered by Byzantine Empress Eirene Komnena and constructed under sponsorship of John II Komnenos, Chora Church, known for its 14th and 15th Century mosaics, and many baths, cisterns, and sarcophagi, today the location is governed within the municipal area of Fatih county [1].





Figure 1: Location and view of the peninsula.

Historical locations of Istanbul reflecting an outstanding universal value and containing the most important features of the city was protected from the degenerative impacts of major changes of 19th and 20th centuries and later the historical heritage was registered and laws to preserve this heritage were enacted. (Istanbul Historical Peninsula Management Plan Draft Report 2011).

1.1 Istanbul in the world heritage list

Following the adoption of World Heritage Convention by UNESCO Member States in 1972 and founding of World Heritage Committee and the World Heritage Foundation in 1976, it took only 10 years for Istanbul (Historic Areas of Istanbul) to be included in the World Heritage List making the city one of first examples of in this process. A look into the ramp up course of sites enlisted in years, from 12 in 1978, to 215 in 1985 and of 690 in 2000 and most recently 878 in 2008, solidifies this expression.

The “Convention Concerning the Conservation of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” adopted at the 16th General Conference of UNESCO in 1972 aims to build the public awareness to protect and conserve sites with outstanding universal value, which are deemed to be common inheritance of the mankind and to ensure necessary cooperation to keep these assets alive, which are threatened and degenerated by various factors [2].

The World Heritage List first proclaimed in 1978 by the World Heritage Committee recognized four sites of Istanbul in the cultural heritage list in 1985, two years after the participation of Turkey in 1983.

The sites referred above are:

- 1- Archaeological Park-Topkapı Palace and Sultanahmet Mosque Region
- 2- Süleymaniye Quarter
- 3- Zeyrek Quarter
- 4- Byzantine seaward ramparts and city walls

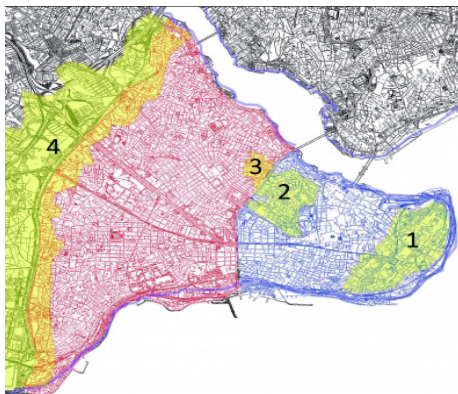


Figure 2: World heritage sites of Istanbul.

The inclusion of these four sites in the World Heritage List requires adequate conservation through applicable legislations. The Archaeological Park was proclaimed under conservation in 1953, while Zeyrek and Süleymaniye were taken under conservation in 1977 and 1979 respectively and finally, the city walls (Theodosian Walls) and its environs were taken under conservation in 1981.

Istanbul was included in the World Heritage List based on the criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) sought for sites with outstanding universal value.

These criteria are as follows.

(i) Historical sites of Istanbul feature a number of unique monuments like the Hagia Sophia, a universal architectural masterpiece designed by Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus between 532 and 537 A.D. and Süleymaniye Complex built by Mimar Sinan between 1550 and 1557 as a marvelous landmark representing Ottoman architecture. (ii) The monuments in Istanbul made significant effects on the territories they are located within. Such as the 6650 meters long city walls, on order of Theodosius II, as a prominent example of fortifications and military architecture along the history (iii) Istanbul hosts a vast number of functional buildings which represent great architectural and artistic importance by the architectural elements they feature. Fresco adorned churches, monumental cisterns, sarcophagi, mosques and baths can be named as several examples. (iv) The City owns a combination of buildings which make up a consistent unity of architectural and technical elements and constitute exceptional examples delineating the stages in human history. Topkapı Palace, Süleymaniye Mosque and its complex, caravanserais, madrasahs, medical schools, almshouses and sarcophagi are particularly important in this sense.

In the area, there are 10,183 pieces of registered cultural assets located within the Historical Peninsula. The total number of registered cultural assets present in the field is 9,421 with a breakdown of 4,089 monuments and 6,324 civil structures. 2,982 of the assets in this area are listed in the World Heritage.

1.2 Conflict between the zoning process and the world heritage proclamation on the historic peninsula

The Historical Peninsula was one of the first zones to be governed under a zoning plan in the republican period of the nation with reference to the historical and cultural diversity featured in the area. The earliest zone planning efforts in the Historical Peninsula dates back to 1933, while the latest plan is the “1/5000 Scale Heritage Conservation and Urban Reconstruction Zoning Plan”, endorsed on Nov 2, 1990, was annulled on May 10, 1991 by a court ruling. In the wake of the ruling and while the litigation was still underway, Istanbul 1st Commission for the Conservation of the Cultural and Natural Assets proclaimed the Historical Peninsula as “Urban Heritage Site, Historical Heritage Site, Urban Heritage Site and Archaeological Site, while with the same decision the area enclosed by the Sur-u Sultani (Walls of Sultan) was registered as 1st Degree Archaeological Site. In 2005, a new “1/5000 Scale Heritage Conservation and Urban Reconstruction Zoning Plan” and “1/1000 Scale Detailed Application Plan” were drafted contemporaneously and endorsed on 26 Jan. 2005 but these were also annulled by a court ruling in the litigation filed by the Chamber of Architects against the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on grounds of “infractions of procedure”. Today, still a new plan could not be put into force and the implementations at the regions are carried out without a plan.

Seeking justification in the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Law No. 2861 a set of “Temporary Restructuring Conditions” was adopted on 26 Mar. 2008. This was also a short-lived application and 28 Sep. 2009 the conditions were annulled, once again with a court ruling.

The next development along the timeline was the proclamation of a new set of “Temporary Restructuring Conditions” by the relevant Commission for the Conservation of the Cultural and Natural Assets, based on the ministerial decree of Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, these conditions were too annulled, by the State Council on 25 Nov. 2010. In this conflict the essential argument is that, the development and management of such a priceless area can not be handled without a plan and based only on a limited set of urbanization criteria. Historical Peninsula, still lacking a framework defined by a 1/5000 scale Master Plan and a 1/1000 Scale Detailed Application Plan faces the risks of considerable deadlocks, illegitimate constructions, earthquake potential, destruction of incorporeal and material values which are in need of a strong conservation. As of today, 1/5000 scale Master Plan is completed by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is currently waitlisted in Metropolitan Assembly agenda, for further approval procedures. It is seen that the Historical Peninsula is being a plan, contrary to the existence of unique cultural heritage and the unfathomable potential of these assets; unplanned and incidental developments driven by political avarice and speculative decisions take place, yielding an unexpectedly deplorable Historical Peninsula in reality.



2 A new concept for the Historical Peninsula: “site management”

Management of the heritage sites is equally as important as the conservation of such sites. When utilizing an area, taken under conservation entirely due to its special features, there has to be an overall evaluation of the area comparable with its importance. The laws in Turkey impose an approach, called the management of area, to be complied with when utilizing a heritage site. The concept of “site management” has been introduced in the cultural and natural heritage legislation, by the Law No. 5226 “Amendment to Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Law and Various Other Laws” amending the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Law No. 2861.

This concept also produced an administrative action and administrative organization. Although the site management organization is not a subject directly dealt with in this paper, it should be emphasized that there are several organizational and operational shortcomings in the site management implementation. Basically, the duties ascribed to the site management organization are; creation of the management site and conservation, development and operation of cultural and natural heritage sites with an intended approach to uphold the educational and cultural interests of the society.

The Historical Peninsula, which was proclaimed a Historic Site by the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Board in 1995, was unfortunately disadvantaged in receiving the processes because of the lack of comprehensive plans, as detailed in the previous section. Concurrently with international recognitions and predictions, important decisions and implementations started to become prominent in the Historical Peninsula especially in the 2000’s. Law No. 5226 “Amendment to Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Law and Various Other Laws” which was enacted in 2004 introduced a new organization. Accordingly, new concepts like “site management”, “Management Plan” and “Conservation, Implementation Audit Bureau” were defined under the Law [3].

In parallel with these measures of reorganization, with the Law No. 5366 ‘Preservation by Renovation and Utilization by Revitalizing of Deteriorated Immovable Historical and Cultural Properties’ enacted in 2005, the Historical Peninsula was entirely proclaimed a renewal site and a number of the renewal projects was launched in the area.

However, these early attempts starting in 2004 soon lost enthusiasm and the Historical Peninsula Management Plan could only be launched within the scope of the projects under the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture program.

Istanbul City, initiating its efforts related to this subject after quite a long delay of decision process still looks uncommitted to “site management”. This paper aims to focus light on the reasons of this lack of commitment, together with the discussions, in the subsequent sections.

2.1 The World Heritage Convention and Management Plan

The ‘Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention’ published by ‘The Intergovernmental Committee for the Conservation of The World Cultural and Natural Heritage’ gives clear definitions to States parties regarding the requirements associated with “site management”. The most important duty ascribed to the State parties in the Operational Guidelines is to ensure the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, including site managers, local and regional governments, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other interested parties and partners in the site management process. There are two issues, which specifically need to be highlighted and elaborated for the Historical Peninsula; The first one is; conservation of the cultural heritage should constitute the axis for the interest of governance and local governance, and secondly; the State party should adopt an impartial and fair definition for the interested party, while ensuring equal representation for all parties. The first legislation framework in Turkey was brought about with the introduction of ‘Management Area’ definition under the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Law in 2004; however related regulations could not take effect before 27 Nov. 2005.

In addition; large size discrete and unconnected so-called renewal projects have been implemented and the growing number of it is clear that such projects pose serious risks to the identity of the site. These include; major transport



Figure 3: Highway projects transiting the Historical Peninsula.



Figure 4: Sulukule Romany Town, before and after the renewal project.

projects, gigantic tunnel connections, cruise ship port, land reclamation (by filling sea), demolition of Romany town which develop in a manner to completely purify the area and as a result seriously threaten the intangible value of cultural heritage located there. Nevertheless, it should be underlined here that, these projects are not created in a setting of transparency and stakeholder engagement.

Proclamation of an entire lot covering the area from Sultanahmet to the end of the city walls as an urban renewal area, and aside from this, the Sulukule, Fener-Balat, Süleymaniye Projects which already received the preliminary approvals, strike the eye by the dissimilarities of projects, methods and decisions adopted. Three major decisions concerning the Historical Peninsula with particular focus on transportation should be highlighted. All three of these projects lack the engagement of stakeholders and a holistic perspective as they are neither part of a transport master plan nor a product of a holistic elaboration where they could undergo a scrutiny in the light of transportation management strategies [4].

1- Golden Horn Subway Bridge: The location of the project was approved within the scope of the Heritage Conservation and Urban Reconstruction Zoning Plan.

2- Marmaray Project Excavations: Not included in the conservation directives. Underground part of the project starts at Sirkeci and ends at Yenikapi.

“These two project share the same origin, however since they are designed independently from each other, the junction point stands as an issue where a solution is sought through alternatives. There is also a sustained proposal of creating an archeology museum at Yenikapi, where artifacts surfaced at the excavations in the area will be displayed.”

3- Bosphorus Underwater Tunnel: A project which will result the emergence of an 8-lane expressway in middle of the Historical Peninsula. The destruction expected in the Historical Peninsula is immense.

Renewal project sites will appear as gray areas within the Heritage Conservation and Urban Reconstruction Zoning Plan and fragmented implementations which are neither integrated into nor consistent with their surroundings in terms of functionality, transportation and density. These developments are almost the exact opposite of the criteria defined in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. That is; the first article indicates; “... world heritage assets should be recognized and evaluated with a shared understanding of the property by all stakeholders...” Considering the current organizational and institutional structures in Turkey and the capabilities and coordination skills of these structures, it is obvious that the above referred principle is disregarded.

There is not a system in place in order to effectively execute the “... cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback ...” proposed in the second article. Management and coordination framework of the urban management system and the planning process has reached an almost total collapse point. Naturally, it is very difficult to perform this policy with fragmented, daily decisions made under intense political pressure and control,

organizational units staffed and structured on political affiliations, and given the lack of even a simplest form of strategy for ensuring transparency.

The policy defined under the third article as "... the involvement of partners and stakeholders" is unfortunately far from becoming a routine practice in Turkey and has not even been fully comprehended yet. This unmanaged, unacquainted approach continues as an exploratory process with trials. The exemplifying situations related with issue reflect that the approach is still not based on systematic and scientific applications causing establishment of incorrect practices. "Sorry, we made a mistake" motto, as a phrase that can never fit into a proper public management process which, increasingly becomes a popular discourse among officials and executives. The fourth article also promotes a practice which is not widely adopted in our society and imposes a transparent allocation of all resources, accessible to all parties and active involvement of stakeholders in the process. In the fifth article "capacity building" is proposed and it is the shared opinion of all parties that such a process should start with the improvement of the organizational capacities. The last article specifies "an accountable, transparent description of how the management system functions" which also seems to be hard to achieve in the short term. There are two reasons for this; first is the poor statistical data collection which is below the European standards. The second, a much more difficult one is the intent to make use of the statistical data collected. Will these data serve as basis for supporting projects and making project estimates in strict compliance with professional code of ethics or will they be used to generate the estimates to serve as the scientific (!) rationale for projects pushed by the political posts? This is a matter that must be assessed and resolved with due care and insight by professionals, before anything else.

Examining the estimates of the 8-Lane Bosphorus Coastal Highway project, which involves an underground pass starting from Sarayburnu and ending at Kumkapı, and by these characteristics represents a serious threat to the Historical Peninsula heritage site, would give most recent and striking example in this matter. Contrarily, the World Heritage Convention establishes a direct dependency between periodic collection of statistical data and a good site management practice, for the reporting to be received from the State parties, which translates into a long term responsibility for states parties and the upholding of public interest in the conservation of cultural heritage sites.

The concepts encountered in the quote "The State Party should also report on significant changes in the ownership, legal status and/or contractual or traditional protective measures, management arrangements and management plans as compared to the situation at the time of inscription or the previous periodic report" refer to the quintessence of heritage sites.

While the process taking place here obviously deteriorates the effectiveness of the management while imposing a serious risk to efficiency as well. Prioritization of public owned lands, changing hands, lack of integrity among the profitability-oriented projects and tendering processes, employment of intervention methods that are not compatible with "conservation" policies, ignoring the cultural diversity aspect of heritage sites which represent an



intangible value to a great extent are probably among the most apparent factors impeding an effective site management.

Another key issue focused on by the World Heritage Center is the proper enactment of legal and administrative arrangements that will ensure the conservation of cultural sites. Examination of the most recent legal and administrative arrangements aimed to reinforce the conservation throughout the Historical Peninsula reveals that such measures do not comply with these fundamental policies. The above referred prioritization law, annulments of plans for renewal areas and conservation plan for the site, absence of a fully implemented site management system, existence of a large number of organizational units in charge of the site and specific matters related with the site, development of independent and incompatible fragmental projects are some of the difficulties which can be named at first sight.

3 Conclusion

Setting up an adaptation of the site management concept specifically for the Historical Peninsula is an utterly recognized necessity. However, this effort can be successful, effective and efficient to the extent that it is interpreted in combination with the prior scale plan. This is why, first and foremost the master plan and application scale maps should be produced using consistent, scientific and transparent methods, these plans should be communicated to stakeholders and must be legitimized.

The site management scheme, which must be designed and executed in a sustainable, must follow the above summarized process with a scope broad enough to cover all necessary details. Rephrasing of well-known facts with new expressions, presenting copycat arguments to which do not have a connection with up-to-date studies created using new perspectives and methods, as customary in our country, will yield no beneficial outcomes. Urban Management system must be dealt with as a whole, while ensuring collaboration and coordination among organizational units, upholding of a planning hierarchy and adoption of a holistic approach to cover all aspects, remain as the key issues that need to be addressed.

In the mean time a very important factor that must be taken under consideration is timing – especially in context, with abiding by the deadline concerning international treaties.

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