# Towards a sustainable and tourism-led urban regeneration objective: Eminonu historical city core

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## Abstract

As one of the oldest settlement areas of Istanbul located within the Historical Peninsula, Eminonu District encompasses a highly distinctive and privileged structure with its historical assets, the considerably different functions undertaken, and the cultural and social diversity it shelters as also accompanied by the rich cultural and natural entities reflected on physical space. However, despite all these assets which Eminonu possesses, the district could not escape from becoming a "deprived" area where serious levels of urban decay are experienced especially in social terms. In this paper, following the brief information and examination of the existing structure and organizational system, the incrementally-given planning decisions for specific parts of the area in question will be considered. In light of these decisions that will be analyzed and the evaluations made accordingly, the "tourism-led" regeneration objective in a socially "deprived" area under "decay" will be scrutinized in the context of sustainability and related proposals will be revealed.
*Keywords: tourism-led regeneration, urban decline and deprivation, housing development policy.*

## 1 Introduction

The Eminonu Region is one of the oldest settlement areas of Istanbul. It is located in the "Historical Peninsula" accepted as a cultural heritage with the intercultural civilizations and values it has embraced for many centuries, has a unique and distinguished structure with its historical values, many different



functions it has assumed, the cultural and social diversity it contains, and many cultural and natural assets that have also been reflected in the physical space as well. "The Historical Peninsula" and the Eminonu District in paeticular attracts more attention with its trade centers and trade functions. The general outlines of the trade sector in the "Historical Peninsula" is determined when informal trade caused by tourism, which has a unique structure and the entertainment sector that is directed mainly by the tourism sector are added to these functions (Kaptan [1]).

Historically, the Eminonu region has always been the core of the city in terms of trade as well as production and trading of traditional handcrafts. It is the most important center of Istanbul for retail and wholesale of textile and leather products, furnishings, food, jewellery, wickerwork and woodwork, carpets and rugs. Resulting from the commercial identity of the region, banks, offices, insurance companies, the Chamber of Commerce, hotels and restaurants have chosen to settle in this area. As a traditional center, it displays quite a strong structure against the new centers (CBD) of the city which develop in an organized manner. However, because of its proprietorship structure and the announcement of the Historical Peninsula as a registered area as a whole, it has not become attractive for global investments which prefer to shape urban space as they wish and Eminonu has gradually become an urban deprivation area.

## 2 Potentials, opportunities and threats

As mentioned above in the previous section, both the Historical Peninsula and the Eminonu region have a very lively identity. It is one of the most significant opportunities for Istanbul with the values and potentials that it possesses. The region, with its regional characteristics, is a very special area incorporating many opportunities, threats and significant potentials that are in contradiction with each other. The region incorporating different functions such as housing, tourism – entertainment, wholesale and retail, commerce, manufacturing, education – culture, services, press-broadcast, administration etc. is also a significant meeting and distribution point with its characteristics of being a "destination" and "transfer". The diversity in physical texture possesses a dimension incorporating sub-groups in socioeconomic structure as well, such as social differences, religious differences, differences in the level of economic income, those having settled after migration from rural areas, minorities, singles, "others".

## 3 The analysis of the planning process and policies directed at the region

### 3.1 The Historical Peninsula and the Eminonu Region within plans with higher scales

To date, two plans with higher scales covering the Istanbul Metropolitan Area have been prepared. There are no special provisions and decisions with regard to the Historical Peninsula in the Regulatory Plan dated 1980 for the Istanbul

Metropolitan Area. However, the provision reading "Adjustments shall be made in the urban areas constituting the historical core and the construction plans shall be implemented accordingly in accordance with the decisions of the Civil Heritage and Monuments Supreme Committee" is included in a general sense with regard to the historical urban areas.

The plan dated 1995 has foreseen the development of the Historical Peninsula as a historical, tourism and retail trade center. It emphasizes topics such as shift of historical residential areas in the Eminonu region and Central Business District functions outside the city walls, their protection from the constraints of CBD and prevention of their destruction and vanishing, restoration of dilapidated areas, decentralization of unfavorable functions causing dilapidation, decentralization of small industries, warehouses and manufacturing as they destruct historical texture. Also, the boundaries of tourism centers within the Historical Peninsula were determined according to the decree of the Council of Ministers and they have a determining role in the plan decisions to be adopted.

### 3.2 The planning process of the Historical Peninsula

The Regulatory Construction Plan aimed at preserving the Historical Peninsula was prepared in 1990. The purpose of the plan was indicated as saving the Historical Peninsula from being a "Central Business District (CBD)" and an urban crowd area and to transform it into a living historical, cultural, tourism and recreation area that is integrated with its settled population". However, the plan was abolished on grounds that there was no public benefit in the implementation of the plan as a consequence of a lawsuit filed by the Chamber of Architects.

While this process was carrying on, all of the Historical Peninsula was announced as a registered area. Then, the Planning and Construction Management of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality started planning activities. After a long process, the plan has just been approved at the beginning of May in 2005.

### 3.3 The policies foreseen for Eminonu by the plans of the Historical Peninsula

The Regulatory Construction Plan dated 1964 with a scale of 1/5000 for the Region within the city walls: The Historical Peninsula is divided into parts according to its different functions and features. The plan does not include decisions directed for the Eminonu region as a whole.

Istanbul Metropolitan Area Regulatory Plans dated 1980 with a scale of 1/50000: In the Plan, the following provision is included with reference to the Historical Urban Areas "For the urban areas constituting the historical core, adaptations shall be made in accordance with the decisions of the Civil Heritage and Monuments Supreme Committee when needed and the approved construction plans will be implemented". Since there are no special provisions and decisions about the Historical Peninsula in the Regulatory Plan dated 1980, there are also no specific plans for Eminonu as well.

The Implementation and Construction Plans dated 1993 for Eminonu for Preservation Purposes with a scale of 1/500: Areas to be protected and different functions and structuring conditions for other areas were determined in these plans.

The Construction Plan dated 2005 for the preservation of the Historical Peninsula: The plan that was approved at the beginning of May 2005 was prepared with a more participatory comprehension when compared with previous planning works. The tools and planning principles directed towards the aim of the plan within the framework of general principles were determined with the effective participation of the actors concerned.

The plan puts forward basic decisions for the Eminonu region such as the decentralization of all functions (small manufacturing facilities and industries) that are not compatible with the cultural and historical identity of Eminonu, bringing functions that are identical with the identity of the region, removal of the reasons causing physical and social decline and dilapidation in Eminonu, transforming it from being an area of decline and dilapidation, preservation and development of socio-cultural functions, provision of their sustainability, etc.

It emphasizes that the determining factor for the development and sustainability of the Historical Peninsula is tourism and that this should definitely be take into consideration in the plan. Eminonu on the other hand is an important area that can undertake this mission. When the distribution of tourism areas are analyzed in the Regulatory Construction Plan for the Preservation of the Historical Peninsula, Eminonu catches attention with a share of 53.87% and 1.70% of the district area in tourism areas that covers only 1.03% in the whole Historical Peninsula. In Eminonu, prestige residence and housing functions are recommended for certain regions in order to attract the elite class for housing purposes. Newman [2] indicates that investments to prestige projects prefer city centers, hence areas within or close to cultural values and existing attraction points. In his opinion, the unfavorable parts of large projects are accepted widely and continue to be attractive and are significant for competing cities.

It is indicated in the plan that the commencement of trade and tourism in housing areas lead to the disappearance of the residents and to the transformation of housing areas to trade and tourism areas that provide higher returns. The plan dated 2005 foresees the development of Eminonu with a tourism identity but has also taken into consideration the point that the housing function should also be increased and that it should not be damaged from the tourism function.

## 4 Estimations about tourism-led regeneration and housing development strategies in the Eminonu region

Besides assuming the function of being the most fundamental center, Eminonu has a very strong potential both for housing and tourism functions due to the intensity of civil and monumental architectural examples and its special status within the city. However, balancing the functions of housing and tourism are among the basic problems in the region as also indicated in the Historical Peninsula Plan 2005.



### 4.1 Scenarios

The Plan of the Historical Peninsula was constituted on different scenarios. Each one of these scenarios foresees a different mission for the area. It seems useful to take a brief overview at the scenarios at this point:

Scenario 1: A trade identity is foreseen for the Historical Peninsula. The identity that the Historical Peninsula will gain when the existing situation continues will be based on a development based on housing and trade. It was assumed that there will be a development with emphasis on housing, trade and services as a consequence of the decentralization of functions such as manufacturing and warehousing that are harmful for the texture, environment and the identity of the area that are prerequisites.

Scenario 2: It aims to increase physical and social quality by establishing a tourism-based identity in the Historical Peninsula where the inventory of historical works of art is intensive. Furthermore, it was also aimed at encouraging high quality and culture-led tourism by planning large public buildings and large public areas on an urban scale as tourism oriented facilities. Also, it was aimed to provide contributions to trade by encouraging the development and diversification of tourism based trade. Housing areas were preserved, trade areas were decreased, and housing + boarding and trade + boarding functions were introduced with the tourism areas. Since the second scenario places more emphasis on tourism, there is a decrease in pure housing areas. Housing areas are decreased by 10% in the second scenario. The areas of existing boarding areas were increased by 21 times and it was made possible to increase the diversity of tourism and to construct boarding areas that can address all kinds of tourist profiles.

Scenario 3: The third scenario aims to evaluate the housing, cultural, tourism and trade functions in the Historical Peninsula, their distribution in a balanced manner, to liven up and provide the sustainability of areas with emphasis on old historical works. It was aimed to emphasize the historical and cultural identity that the Historical Peninsula bears for many centuries, to develop housing areas along with this identity.

Scenario 4: The fourth scenario ranks first in terms of cultural areas as it supports the revitalization of all historical art works and their use for cultural purposes. It foresees the combination of utopia, earthquake scenario or the ancient – modern synthesis, aims to emphasize the traces of the past 3 cultures (Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman) in the Historical Peninsula and to form a synthesis by also adding modern comprehension as well.

### 4.2 Tourism-led regeneration in Eminonu and development of housing areas

The plan dated 2005 emphasizes that the determining factor in the development and sustainability of the Historical Peninsula should be tourism and that this should absolutely be taken into consideration for all decisions related with the plan. Hence, while the plan comes up with different scenarios of its own, it indirectly accepts the 2nd scenario. Therefore, within the scope of this section, it

would be useful to focus on the contributions of a tourism-oriented development in Eminonu and their effects on the development of housing areas.

One of the most important points that should not be forgotten within this framework is the changing situation of the tourist profile beside the internal dynamics of the region. "The findings of the tourism researches conducted lately have much more to say about the supply dimension of the matter rather than the demand dimension. However, there are also certain studies conducted, which focus on the growing cultural tourism sector. It is known that the profile of visitors coming to the cities is changing. Urban tourists are typically independent and experienced travelers that generally repeat their visits. They may prefer new locations that are outside the center and may also be attracted to prestigious spaces with architecture and ambience as well as certain points of attraction. What the urban tourists are in search of are the spaces necessary for consumption (Newman [2]). Comprehension of the characteristics of certain places needs to query how a number of certain factors are combined. At this point, history, environmental quality, opinions of the local population and consumption areas is important. The most important class that will contribute the support of locations is the "middle" class. Their interpretative qualities will provide an opportunity for the revaluation of all the potentials of the area (Newman [2]).

The sustainability of the Eminonu region within the framework of its core values is directly related with provision of sustainability of culture in societies, taking into consideration and development of all values that were present in the past in a conscious and multidimensional manner for this purpose and coming up with rooted policies for this purpose as indicated by Ergun [3] as well.

Within this framework, all decisions and strategies to be developed in this context should be interpreted in accordance with these data. The matter is a very serious and comprehensive process that should be dealt with within the framework of logic of planning. The existence of such an extensive plan based on comprehensive analysis is an advantage for the region. However, there is need to concentrate on the nuances here. When the 2nd scenario emphasized by the system, central government and departments concerned is analyzed by keeping these points in mind, it is observed that no special emphasis is placed on the housing function and the weight is placed on the tourism function. However, searching for a balance that will provide an opportunity for the coexistence of tourism and residences is indispensable. It is natural that the tourism values and tourism function of the region is emphasized. However, the use of large buildings for tourism purposes and the settlement of prospective 5 star hotels with a large volume, which most probably belong to a chain and displaying a dominant character will not only damage the identity of the area but will also harm the unique identity of becoming a mystical synthesis of the east and west.

Strengths: The tourism function will provide economic returns to the region, strengthen its domestic economy and help its development, intensification of tourism in such a sub-region and attracting investments in different scales and profiles will provide action for the region and transform it into a center of prestige and attraction as the most important historical center of the city. This tendency will be able to attract large scale projects and prestige projects into the

region. The profile with respect to proprietorship of houses will also change in the region, the status of which will improve and a movement of socialization will be observed where the higher income and culture groups will also be attracted.

Urban regeneration movements will be observed in the areas that especially have a very intensive potential culturally. The areas that are desolate in the evenings and the criminal regions in the existing structure will be able to get rid of these negative points. The region will be able to get rid of the social sub-groups that impose a problem within the existing structure. It will be possible to preserve, renew and enliven the historical values and architectural inventory of the region. It will be possible to enliven certain unique areas of activity that are starting to be lost within the region. The historical, cultural and geographical data of the area are very strong for prestige projects and large-scale investments.

Weaknesses: The social context of the area is being neglected. Since the boundaries of tourism are not determined, the socioeconomic level and quality of the area may be under threat against the danger of a negative growth in tourism. The area may be treated and perceived as an "object" in time with the pressure of tourism, which may damage the identity of the areas as well as the existing potentials. One of the most important features of the area is the fact that it incorporates housing areas belonging to different periods and different cultures. Weakening this function will automatically cause the loss of certain values that have existed within the historical process.

Opportunities: The traditional identity of the area and the potentials that it has are strong. The potentials concerned are supported not only by national but also by international institutions and organizations. The stock of buildings in the area is very diverse and strong in terms of cultural and historical aspects. The existence of large buildings provides an advantage for the fulfillment of certain functions.

Threats: Some problems may be encountered with respect to making the region attractive. In the event that the existing large structures are used for tourism purposes, there will be a profile for a tourism facility that is not compatible with the identity of the area. This structure will lead to an outcome that is not compatible with the existing identity of the region and the tourist profile. The prospective extreme and uncontrolled growth that may take place in the tourism sector will lead to the exclusion of housing functions as a whole. The area that has adopted a tendency of nobility against tourism will lose its existing structure for the social profile. The users of houses belonging to the upper income group, which will replace the middle class, will lead to a social transformation in the region and the process that will start will directly affect the dynamics of the region. Along with tourism, social erosion will be inevitable, the tourism texture will pose a threat for the area and damage historical texture with the pressure of reaching a spatial structure. An economic activity such as tourism, which has high economic returns will increase speculative actions. It will be necessary to plan the social and technical fitting areas that the high number of visitors who will come to the area shall need and to organize the technical service areas to meet all needs.



## 5 Conclusion and assessment

In conclusion, the Eminonu region possesses the potential to set up its future absolutely with tourism. However, there is a need for a tourism scenario that will not be in contradiction with the scale and general identity of the region within a profile that is compatible with the region. When we evaluate the matter by taking into consideration the givens and scenarios of the Historical Peninsula, the conclusions and recommendations given below are reached:

Within the strategic tourism planning studies to be conducted for the whole city in general, the Eminonu region should be handled in a manner that is different from other regions with its special and unique location. When the question of "Should Eminonu be an area of transformation in a tourism oriented manner in the future" is asked and the existing potential in the region is reviewed, it is possible to conclude that a transformation in a tourism oriented manner is inevitable. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Eminonu, just like the whole Historical Peninsula, has to adopt a means of development incorporating the housing identity as well in order to provide its sustainability. It has to develop and emphasize this identity with the measures that it will take in the medium and long run. When a correct balance in terms of use and functioning is established between tourism-housing in the region, the use of tourism and housing shall provide contributions to the traditional identity of the Eminonu region and will assume an effective role for the provision of sustainability. The first thing that should be done for the establishment of such a balance is to query the type of tourism targeted. The tourism aimed for the region is the kind that does not need large stocks of buildings, will not be transformed into chain hotels, will display civil architectural examples compatible with its function, tourism oriented, far from show off, emphasizing the identity of the Eminonu region (boarding houses provided by inhabitants, boutique hotels etc), that do not damage the housing function, does not lead to a decrease in owner occupation and does not encourage private rented housing. The transformation in the pattern of change of proprietorship in the area and consequently of tenure pattern will speed up (Aaen [4]). The local governments should play a significant role for guiding this process in a correct manner and prevent speculations and they should provide structures and fittings that will be able to follow up the process in an effective manner. It is necessary to supply houses that are accessible for the potential users in order to provide an incentive for the uses of houses and the basis to provide legality should be prepared. A contemporary, rehabilitated housing function will nourish and develop this target. Because good housing helps to improve health, reduce crime and enhance quality of life (Edgar and Taylor [5]). Hence, the tourism capacity in the region will increase. The tourism development strategy can assume a fundamental function for the economic transformation in a city as Shutt [6] suggested. Therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration that any tourism oriented transformation strategy in the region might have a trigger effect both for the area specifically and for the cit as a whole in general. Business opportunities supporting the tourism function on one side and providing business opportunities for the inhabitants of the region should be



created, local governments should be effective for developing the tourism oriented business capacity in the region. Within this framework, the strategies developed for the regions in the area for tourism and housing, will contribute the sustainable development of the region in interaction with each other and create a strong social structure, a unique tourism profile and a trade function supporting this structure.

Relying only on a single factor for the preservation and development of an area is considered to be a weak attempt for the provision of the sustainability of the area when the prospect of extinction of that single factor is considered to take place in the long run. For this region, although tourism may seem as a basic function providing income and returns for today and for the medium run in the Eminonu Region, the axes may change as a consequence of planning decisions or a strategic movement that comes from top. In this case, it seems beneficial to also hold on tightly to the housing function. Because, the most fundamental component that makes an area live until the very end is the house; hence the human factor. Developing the social structure with educational projects, health projects, social goals such as sports and recreation will contribute to the transformation of the region in a tourism-oriented manner in the long run. It is deemed useful to remind that the investments made in the areas within the city for this purpose Report on the DoE Inner City Programs [7] always reach their goal. Similarly, decentralization of office buildings located in the traditional centers (Walton and Milner [8]) that damage the identity of the area and intensification of prestigious office buildings in the area should be taken into consideration as another factor that will contribute the sustainability of the region.

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