



TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
WIEN
Vienna | Austria

DIPLOMARBEIT

Istanbul: City of Gold

**ausgeführt zum Zwecke der Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines
Diplom-Ingenieurin**

unter der Leitung

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**E251 - Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Bauforschung und
Denkmalpflege**

eingereicht an der Technischen Universität Wien

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Wien, am

Unterschrift

Abstract

Istanbul is one of the World's most populous metropolises with an estimated 15 Million Inhabitants.

With great sums of people, comes great responsibility. Architects, urban planners and other decision makers try -in their own way and with their own agendas- to make this grand city a liveable environment for its residents. Or do they? If you ask the residents, few would speak fondly of said *professionals*. According to the people, the city drifts into an unbearable state of chaos every single day. In 2016, for the first time in its history, the number of people who moved out of Istanbul was actually higher than the number incoming.

Following the footsteps of Mike Davis' broadly discussed book "***City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles***", this thesis focuses on the impact of politics and economic globalization upon different segments of Istanbul's society, on the struggles of everyday life and the fight for leaving a better city for future generations.

Abstrakt

Istanbul ist eine der bevölkerungsreichsten Metropolen der Welt mit 15 Millionen Einwohnern.

Mit großen Summen an Menschen geht große Verantwortung einher. Architekten, Stadtplaner und andere Entscheidungsmacher versuchen - auf ihre eigene Art und Weise - diese Großstadt zu einer lebenswerten Umgebung für ihre Bewohner zu machen. Oder etwa nicht? Wenn Sie die Bewohner fragen, würden sich nicht viele positiv über die besagten *Fachleute* äußern. Laut Istanbul's Bürgern driftet die Stadt jeden Tag in einen unerträglichen Chaoszustand. Zum ersten Mal in seiner Geschichte war 2016 die Zahl der Menschen, die aus Istanbul wegzogen, höher als die Zahl der Neuankömmlinge.

Auf den Spuren von Mike Davis breit diskutiertem Buch "City of Quartz: Ausgrabung der Zukunft in Los Angeles" konzentriert sich diese Arbeit auf die Auswirkungen von Politik und ökonomischer Globalisierung auf verschiedene Segmente der Istanbul'ser Gesellschaft, deren Alltagsleben und den Kampf um eine bessere Stadt für die nächsten Generationen.

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Prologue

“Views from the futures Past”

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CITY OF GOLD



Fig.1 : Panoramic View from the Galata Tower, 1890

CITY OF GOLD

On April 1935, a German citizen named Helmut Mecler, holding a petition, went through the doors of Municipality of Istanbul. He left the building with a smiling face as he received permission to do a four-day excavation in Istanbul's historic Karacaahmet Cemetery. As he found nothing after days of digging, he was rather disappointed and returned to his country. The reason for this man to come all the way from Germany was because of a myth he had heard; the buried treasure of leper victims. The lepers buried the gold coins they received as charity, but sadly didn't get the chance to spend¹.

There are many other hidden treasure myths surrounding Istanbul, but this bizarre and officially recorded incident might give substance to a well-known Turkish proverb;

Istanbul's earth and stones are made of gold.

These captivating words which would later become the motto of mass migration from rural parts of the country towards the city in also could be additional fuel for the first migration wave during the '40s. The population to this day continues to increase. Thus, Istanbul is one of the world's most crowded Metropole cities with an estimated 15 Million inhabitants². (The unofficial estimated number is roughly 23 Million inhabitants.)

Istanbul has had many different names throughout history, depending on *who* was holding political power over the area at the time. In 330CE, *Constantinople* became the capital of the Byzantine Empire and Roman emperors ruled the city for the next eleven centuries. It was built on the site of the ancient Greek city *Byzantion* (hence the name of the empire) and astonished its visitors with its architectural structures and riches, such as giant lion statues of gold and golden birds singing on golden trees (therefore, it is safe to assume that the "gold" theme has been going on for quite a while). After numerous attacks and crusades from the west, Constantinople lost its original power and was conquered in 1453 by the Ottoman Emperor, Mehmet the Conqueror. The city was later given a makeover and took the name *Kostantiniyye* which held under the Ottoman rule until World War I. Following WWI and six years after the founding of the Turkish Republic, the current name *Istanbul* was officially given in March 1929.

To understand power shifts, therefore the decision-making process in

Istanbul's recent past, one has to learn the *dynamics of politics* throughout the years.

In March 1923, Ankara was declared the capital of the Turkish Republic, causing dismay and surprise amongst many government officials and the general public. The decision is explained by the founding father of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on his famous, self-written book *Nutuk* (en. *The Speech*): the position of Istanbul proved to be a liability in WWI, as it was open to attacks from both land and sea. Ankara in this context is more protected by land. Furthermore, it was necessary to show the World the ability of the Turkish public by building a capital from scratch - just before WWI, in 1914, Istanbul already had an estimated 1,125,000 inhabitants and Ankara was still considered a rural town.

Nonetheless, naming another city as the Republic's capital and shifting resources to other areas never detracted from Istanbul's attraction; as the *City of Gold*: the locomotive city of economic improvement and with its tremendous sociological impact as the *trendsetter* of today's Turkey. The geographical position, although this was the reason why Istanbul lost its throne as the capital city after more than two millennia is exactly what attracts investors and therefore people to the area.

Another important milestone in modern Istanbul was the new municipality law³ which was enacted in 1930, authorizing governors to "*engage in any kind of initiative that may be of benefit to the people of the township*". In the following years, with the establishment of the Bank of Municipalities (1933), tasks such as providing and provision of drinking water (which in the past belonged to the foreign institutions with concession partnerships) and management of public transport was given directly to the municipalities. In 1936, Municipality of Istanbul contacted French architect and urban planner Henri Prost, who served as Istanbul's chief planner until 1951 and prepared the first master-plan of the city; as well as new avenues, parks, promenades and squares for Istanbul, which would reflect a European style. He is best known for his project, reorganization of the Taksim area, demolishing late Ottoman Artillery Barracks and constructing a new promenade⁴.

As a result of a lack of resources, the municipality of Istanbul could neither realize most of Prost's plans nor fulfil their tasks sufficiently; therefore local government and the decision-making process were taken over by the central government.

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Fig.2 : First Master Plan of Istanbul by Henri Prost, 1937

The strains of the Second World War only increased these complications. With a new law enacted in the year 1948, budget and funding regulations for municipalities made it hardly possible for them to function much further.

Meanwhile, upwards movement in population numbers already started at the beginning of the 1940s, at the brink of World War II. Although the Turkish Republic declared itself neutral in the war, the effects of a war in neighbouring countries certainly had socio-economic sanctions. As a result of helping said neighbouring countries and with rising refugee numbers, as well as a decline in foreign trade and, shortage of supplies – a famine began. Products of agriculture and farming were partially confiscated by the government under the name of solidarity. With the *Marshall Aid*, mechanization in agriculture caused unemployment amongst peasants. Istanbul, being the center of trade, industry, service and gateway, must have been an attractive destination where one can at least make sure to have a somewhat fuller belly as opposed to rural areas where there are difficulties of help to reach and voices of being heard.

So how did the city, planners and politicians, react to the first wave of migration to the area?

In 1950, for the first time in the young Turkish Republic's history (since 1923), parliament's leading party changed. Head of the new ruling party, -Democratic Party- Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, had a close interest in Istanbul, therefore he took immediate measures for "*beautification*" of the city, commissioning *Turkish*⁵ architects and engineers to carry out the task.

In the second half of the '50s, Istanbul became a large construction site while in the midst of civil unrest caused by the oppression of non-Muslim ethnic groups (more on this subject will be discussed in the following chapter). The reconstruction process came to a halt in 1960 with the first coup d'état⁶ in the Republic's history, which resulted in the hanging of Prime Minister Menderes.

A year later, with a series of new bills added to the constitution; *local authorities were to be elected by the townspeople* (first elections were held in 1963) and more importantly, *regional governors and municipalities were to receive funding and consecutive shares from the taxes according to the size of the city and number of inhabitants.*

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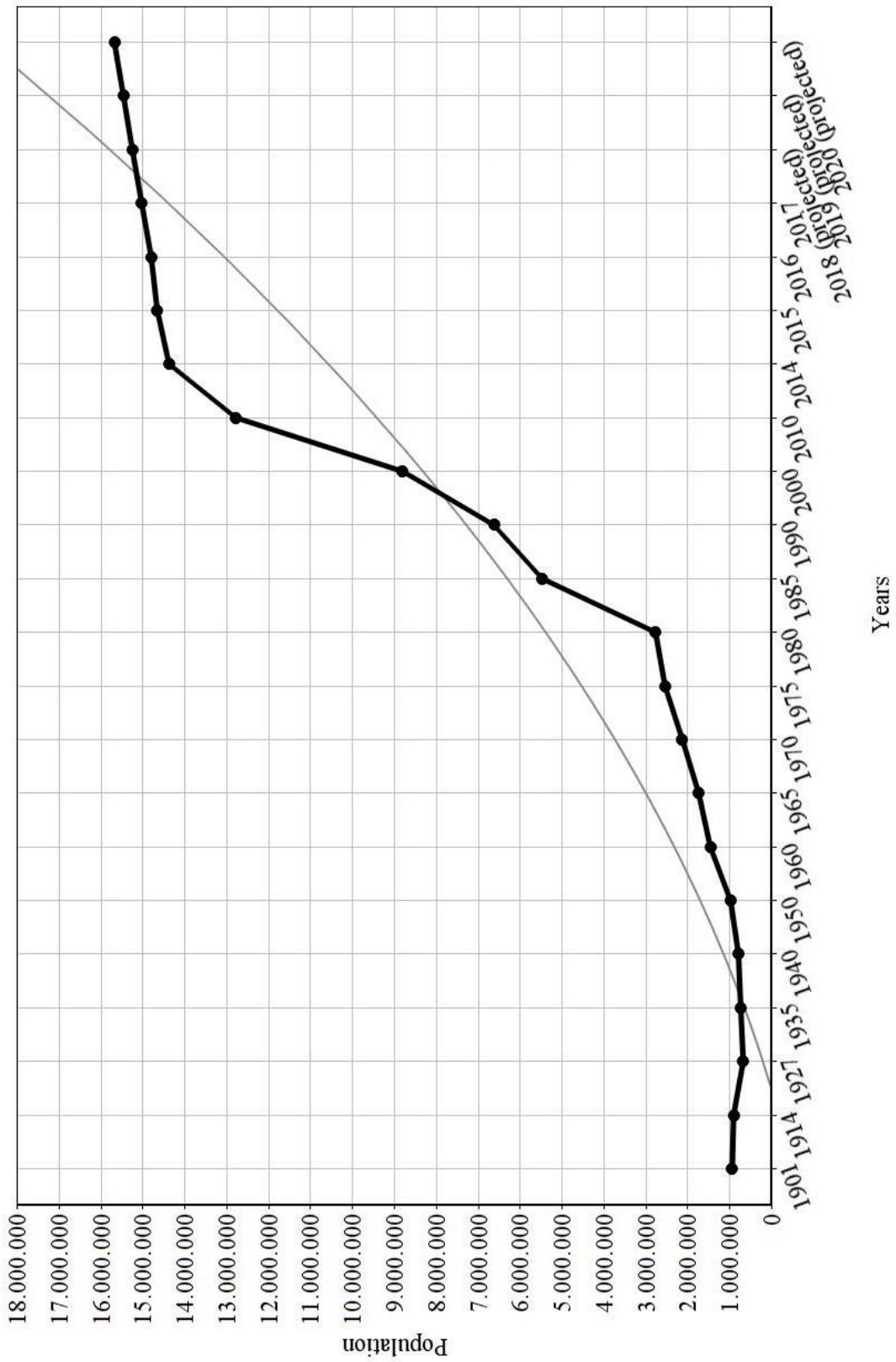


Fig.3 : Population growth in years – Istanbul²

This subtle but very important change in the tax collecting system probably set the tone for the future.

A further political turning point in the history of the Turkish Republic was the 3-year military governance after the coup of 1980. Characteristically under this long-lasting martial law came the centralization of power resulting in that jurisdiction of local governance was once again switched back to central military government. The governors were appointed (a different one each year, from 1981 to 1984), not elected.

The reason behind this was explained through the fragile state the country was in; allegedly, local governances were “too politicized” to bring services to people and furthermore, their economical funding were to be inspected by the military. Later throughout the years between 1983 – 1985, with the new constitution and stabilization of political situation, municipalities were given their status back; with a few extras such as private (non-governmental) administrative committees and (re)construction laws, as well as a rise in share of taxes which is collected in jurisdiction of the municipality itself, consequently providing financial relief.

Thus, the following conclusions were manifested;

1) Jurisdiction and duties of the municipal government were diverted back and forth between the central government and the municipal government, during a period of almost four decades (1940-1983); precisely when Istanbul started to grow not just by land boundaries, but also inhabitants (from roughly 800.000 to 5,5 million). Even though municipalities had been making 5-year development plans since 1960, this instability in authority inevitably caused a lack of fore-planning for the city, like a beast with two heads not knowing where to go, which can arguably be one of the reasons why Istanbul finds itself in a chaotic state today. After all, if the foundation is not well planned and executed, no one can expect a building to stand. At least not for long.

2) More inhabitants produce more taxes - therefore more funding. More funding results in more services provided for inhabitants, which act as an attraction for the city. This puts the metropolis municipalities such as Istanbul, into an unending chain reaction. Since these dynamics are constantly changing, it becomes increasingly difficult to plan ahead.

3) It is safe to say that there is a correlation between drastic changes in the political landscape and the drastic changes (upwards) in the number of inhabitants in Istanbul. To begin with in 1950, the shift in parliamentary power (from one party majority rule to coalition) for the first time since the founding of the Republic. Secondly with the coup d'état in early '80s, three year rule of martial law followed with a new *civil* constitution. Yet the most radical phase starting in early 2000's, following the global financial crisis and end of the coalition era in the parliament, replaced by the privatization-friendly, one-party majority rule of Erdogan's AKP⁷ (ongoing,2019) .

NOTES

¹ İstanbul'un Taşı Toprağı Hazine, Hurriyet Newspaper, 24.01.2008

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/istanbulun-tasi-topragi-hazine-8091734>

² Population Growth in Years

Turkish Institute of Statistics - www.tuik.gov.tr/PreIstatistikTablo.do?istab_id=1590

³ Laws enacted in the year 1930 & 1935, Law of Municipalities, No : 1580

Grand National Assembly of Turkey -

https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmco15/kanuntbmmco15/kanuntbmmco1502763.pdf

⁴ Bilsel, *Henri Prost's planning of Istanbul*, pp.105-110

⁵ *General Remark* : As opposed to the previous government, Menderes supported and initiated the *Turkification* in the process. His tendencies and decisions, although supported by the Turkish public, may have been one of the reasons of the unrest between Turkish and Non-Muslim ethnic groups.

⁶ **coup d'état** : military intervention of the state. There are several coup's in Turkish Republic's history in the years of; 1960 , 1971 (memorandum), 1980 (lasted 3 years), 1997(memorandum), 2007(memorandum), 2015(alleged / attempted)

⁷ **AKP**: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (en: Justice and Development Party)

Chapter One

“Sunshine or Noir?”

Gold or just Bricks and Stones?

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Fig.4 : still image from the Movie "Topkapi" 1964

If time travel was a possibility, we could jump into a TARDIS¹ and visit wherever, most importantly, *whenever* we would like. Since the likeliness of that happening exists only in Sci-Fi TV series and films or books, we need to search for more realistic options to go back in time and get a glimpse of what life was like in the past. Using the power of film, we are able to Time-Travel. Considering cinema as a powerful tool to mirror the location which it was filmed at, it is a safe bet to look at Yesilcam – also known as -, Turkish Hollywood.

There are very few films produced in the first 40 years of 20th Century in Turkish cinema. Yet, even in the first films that were made in the '40s, Istanbul is undoubtedly the main star; with its wide “*European*” streets (thanks to the plans of Henri Prost), a public transportation that works like a clock and inhabitants dressed in stylish hats and walking sticks, everything works efficiently, so that wives and children know exactly what time their father will come home from work. The rich city life portrayed in these films is what people of Anatolia have seen and most likely were amazed by in the first place.

It's safe to say that cinema laid down the first groundwork for the migration boom in the '40s but of course, it was not the only reason behind it. As mentioned earlier, the Marshall Plan² came into full force in 1948, the main goal of which was to provide economic assistance and the modernisation of industry, by doing so stopping Communism spreading to war-torn Europe after WWII.

Turkey was a county with 75% of its people working in agriculture and 90% of them in possession of their own land, yet they had to receive bread in rations – as a result of the WWII sanctions. This seemingly *helping hand* of the US with Marshall Plan introducing machinery to agriculture, although came as a fresh breath of air would later clog the economic arteries of Turkish Republic and eventually disrupt the balance between rural land and the city.

For Turkey was still an agricultural country, it had to import machinery and oil to modernize its industry (as mentioned, in which the Marshall Aid was partially used). Yet, with machinery to process the land much more effectively, most of the farmers and villagers who worked in agriculture became unemployed.

A further aspect to be mentioned is the Village Institutes, which held tremendous importance in improving rural life between 1940 and 1954. This simple but genius system had fundamentally a chain education method; trainers and teachers alike would go to larger villages and teach (in a practice-oriented way). Those who finished education would go back to their

smaller villages and teach their neighbours and families. Thanks to this system, in villages -where the number of people who could read was previously less than 5%- produced artists, authors and even scientists. Unfortunately, the wide success of Village Institutes drew too much attention to *landowners* and those who liked to *rule* over the villagers, since it is more difficult to subdue educated people. These institutes were shut down in 1954 by Adnan Menderes's government. According to many historians, shutting down the Village Institutes caused a butterfly effect in Turkish history, largely disrupting a healthy economic and social improvement of the nation, as well as starting the first migration movement to the cities, mainly to Istanbul.

The First Boomers

The best and quickest way of learning about things is to ask someone who has done it before us. It is also our first instinct, just like in the animal kingdom, to live in packs with our own kind. Therefore it's not hard to understand that the newcomers just arriving in a new city should seek people of their own; family members and neighbours from their hometowns to settle down with, thus resulting in a migration chain and making their own town inside a larger area. In most cases of the first boomers, they occupied the land outside metropolitan limits and made their own *illegal* residential territories, casual houses with no planning, made from just bricks and stones, creating urban development as well as separation of the social and urban culture.

Towards the late '40s and through the '50s, Istanbul was, in a way rediscovered; in means of propaganda and commercial use. Particularly after the consecutive general and municipal election wins of Adnan Menderes's DP. The new government named Istanbul's recreation as the "*grand project*", considering it as a political instrument and a PR stunt. Indeed, even in the eastern part of Turkey, Istanbul's reproduction turned into Menderes' primary theme in his rally talks for the national election in 1957. For him and his party, it was crucial to secure Istanbul in municipality elections, being the pearl of the country, winning beautiful Istanbul meant to cement their power and authority as the ruling party.

A strategy which worked so well, that it is used even today in Turkish politics.



Fig.5 : still image From the Movie "Birds of Exile" 1964

Therefore the DP government openly supported³ the use and emergence of slums in a way of winning favours from the citizens; the corresponding law stated *if you find an unoccupied land and put a roof over it, nobody can tear it down*. After all, it all boiled down to the votes and it isn't expected of people to vote in your favour if you knock their houses over their heads.

Although, this philosophy deserves some credit, two of major issues became clear. The rising need for housing and a working infrastructure system became concerns which no longer could be ignored. The city's reconstruction was backed by the government, people kept immigrating from the rural parts while the need for cheap labor had risen, making the land a juicy fruit ready for picking for many capital owners who started to buy land in Istanbul; which would eventually also mean a rise in tax and cash flow. Here again, we can talk about an uncontrollable chain reaction.

During the attempt of "bringing Istanbul back to its glory", PM Menderes was feeding the nationalist discourse further by not commissioning Henri Prost and calling Turkish architects and engineers to the task. Which in no means should be seen as a negative approach as long as the results and experiences collected from the western style of urbanism aren't neglected. In 1952, a Temporary Revision Committee was established in order to evaluate former plans made by Prost. 4 years later, in 1956, this committee finally came up with a master plan to organize and redesign the city; in this plan, they borrowed Prost's idea to open up the city with wide boulevards (western approach), by putting mosques, fountains and other traditional orient architecture as cornerstones in the spotlight (traditional approach). With Menderes' strong personal interest to the subject, the peak point of expropriations (73%) was reached between 1956 to 1960 and the city had a period of massive de- and reconstruction much similar to New York's process in the '50s through '60s; conducted by Robert Moses.

The end of this era is marked by the coup which resulted in Menderes' hanging in 1960. Ironically, Menderes' passion in Istanbul's development played a considerable part in his lawsuit; he had moved funds and a large amount of tax money into Istanbul project unjustly which at the end, became his own undoing.

After a few decades, in 1990, the Turkish Parliament has returned Menderes' and two of his ministers' -who were executed like him -, reputation back. Today, every person has his own views on Menderes and what happened back then, yet very few talks about it. Maybe because his case has many similarities to today's politicians and people find it better to be silent and keep living instead of going through such a dark period of time.

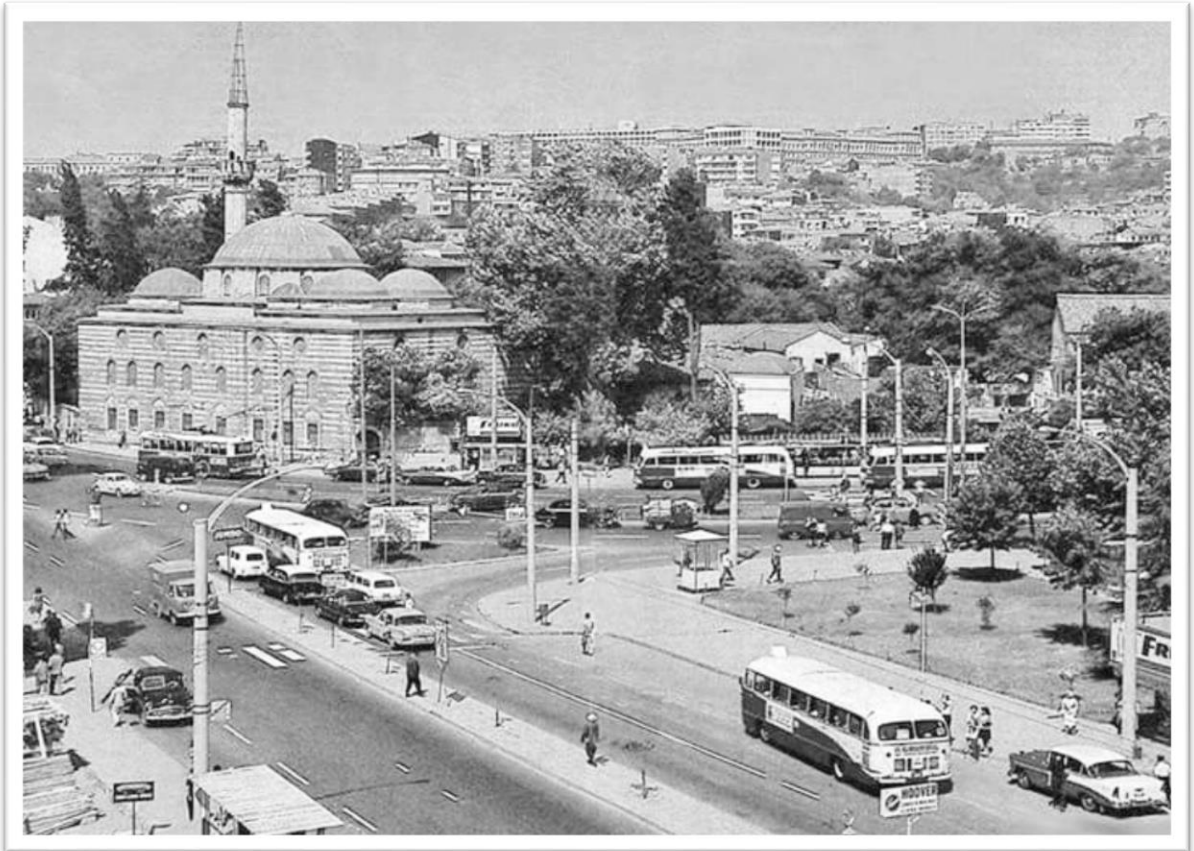


Fig.6 : Barbaros Boulevard and Sinan Pasha Mosque , Besiktas, 1960 's

Picking up from where we left the first Boomers, they kept building houses overnight, living off of the land - the way they know from their rural hometowns. Even though the issue with housing became apparent in the '50s, because of a series of political events disrupted the economical and social growth of the country, point on decisions were not made. In fact, the first social housing development association formed by the government⁴, dates near the end of 20th Century, in the mid-1980's.

The Underdogs

*“[...]The inhabitants present a remarkable conglomeration of different races, various nationalities, diverse languages, distinctive costumes and conflicting faiths, giving, it is true, a singular interest to what may be termed the human scenery of the city, but rendering impossible any close social cohesion or the development of a common social life.[...]”*⁵

– *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

The Ottoman Empire owed a part of its success to an open doors policy to merchants from all over the World, rightly using Istanbul's geographical position as a gateway between the far East and West. Considering Beijing, China was one end of the legendary Silk Road and *Kostantiniyye* was the other. After almost five centuries of Ottoman rule over Istanbul, it is safe to say that these merchants from different backgrounds and ethnic groups have long found their home there. Almost a decade after the regime change and founding of the Republic of Turkey, ¼ of the *Istanbulites*⁶ were of Non-Muslim origin⁷.

As a result in the rise of nationalism and specifically populist - nationalist discourses from the DP government and the first boomers emigrating from rural Anatolia, the number of Non-Muslim residents of Istanbul dropped to 10%, in just 15 years.

Also must be taken into consideration that, following Bulgaria's one nation policy, around 500.000 Bulgarian-Turks were forced to immigrate to Turkey (between 1950 - 1990), who mostly relocated in and around Istanbul.⁸

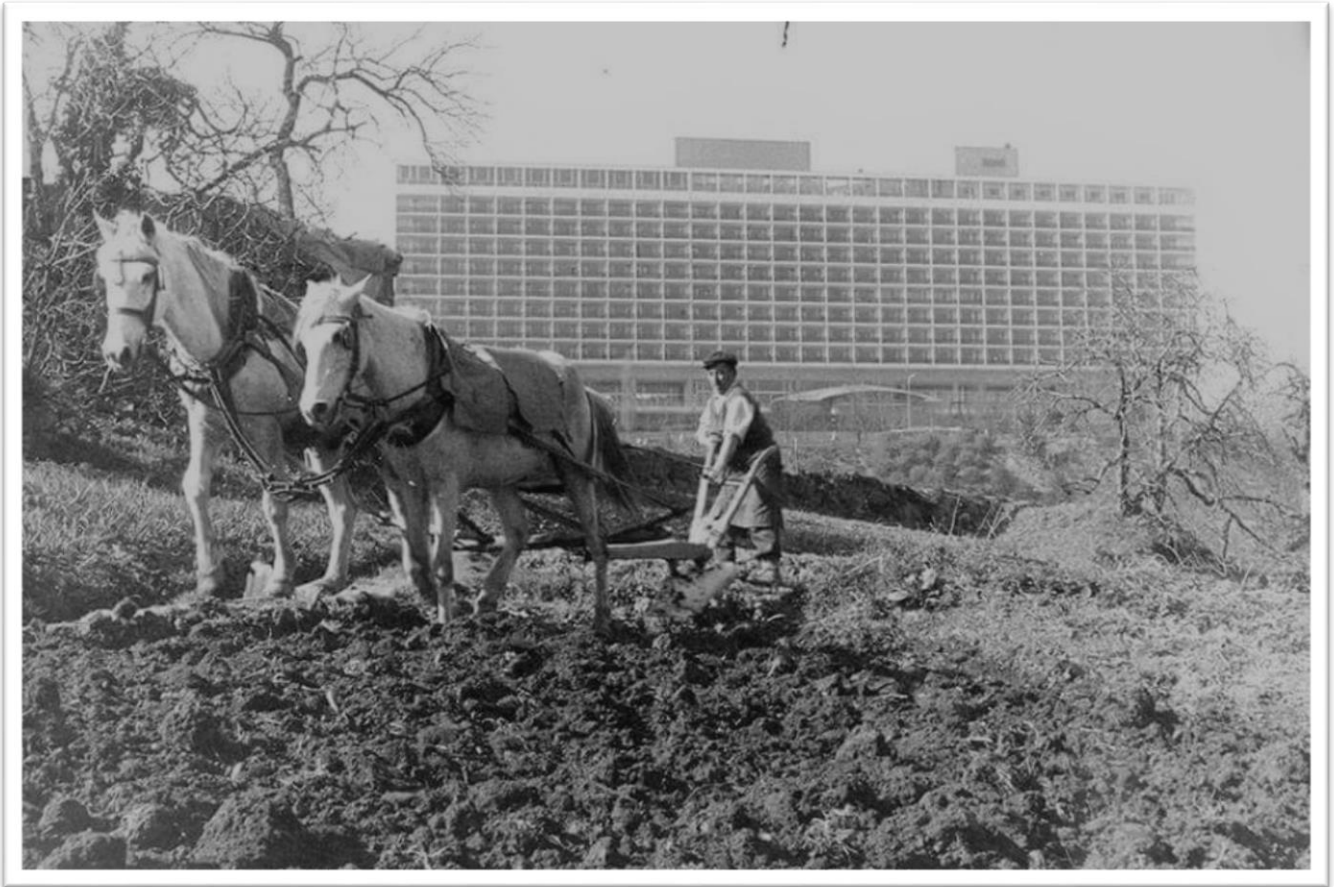


Fig.7 : Hilton Hotel near Harbiye, 1950

In the midst of reconstruction and demolishing of Istanbul, all while protecting Turkish / Islamic values; the city was also opening up her doors to a modernist and international way of living; with the network of roads and highways connecting not only cities but also neighbouring countries. The American Dream (supported by DP's foreign policy) was being pumped to veins of the city, while at the same time encouraging middle-class life, the government was focusing on the middle-class housing instead of attending to the needs of the poor. By the '40s around 38% of Turkey's business enterprise was in Istanbul, this amount risen up to 45% by the '60s. Matching with the boost of flowing capital, more people could take part in the luxurious lifestyle that Istanbul could offer.

“For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.”

- Newton

From the boomers' perspective, it was a completely new environment; both natural and sociological. In order to feel more secure themselves, they turned their focus mostly to their religion -Islam- as a binding instrument.

They didn't see the golden Istanbul from the films, nor lived in the wealthy central districts. The Non-Muslims being merchants and richer, owned properties in these wealthy historical districts, therefore the must have been the target of newcomers' frustration.

On the other hand, to the original Istanbulites Muslim and Non-Muslim alike, these newcomers were an unsightly bunch. They spoke the language with a different accent and pronunciation, dressed in a less formal (or modern) attire and were less educated. Furthermore, they weren't open to interaction, as they formed their own miniature villages and traded -both economically and socially- between themselves. Their frustration made them appear aggressive and accused of crimes.

Adding to this tension between people, the governments' approach was adding fuel to the fire. Turkish politicians were not the only ones who used nationalism and populism as a way of gaining votes but also their Greek counterparts had chosen a similar path: following a nationalist conservative policy, starting from 1954 they have claimed an enosis between Greece and Cyprus, which only brought more bad blood between Turks and Greeks.

Cyprus, at the time, was governed by Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom. The issue with Cyprus had unfolded rather messily afterward, followed by social and political unrest for the next 20 years, climaxing in 1974 with the Turkish army interference on the island.

In the light of these circumstances, a milestone event which would change the face of Istanbul forever took place. On September 6th, a forged news story was published in Turkish press; claiming a bomb was planted in Thessaloniki – Greece, in Atatürk's birth house. This caused (allegedly) organized mobs attacking the Greeks who lived in Istanbul, targeted their private properties; shops and houses as well as their religious bases such as churches and cemeteries. Other Non-Muslim minorities were also affected, mostly in the merchant and cosmopolitan district of Beyoglu.

During his election rally speeches, Menderes has used the term "*Istanbul against Beyoglu*", in a means to support his nationalist policies, plans to bring back Istanbul to her glory days and justifying deconstruction. His government's lack of action against the mobs (which occurred simultaneously in Istanbul and Izmir) were indications of an orchestrated move on the Non-Muslim minorities. There are numerous witnesses, who at the time worked in the Police force, admitted that they received orders to stand down and not to interfere with the mobs⁹. This fact also played an important role in the lawsuit against Menderes which finally cost him his life. His motives are unknown.

It must be mentioned that there were also examples of solidarity between non-Muslims and their Muslim neighbours, there are records of a single Turkish person saving a whole street by saying "There are no Greeks living around here" and causing the mob to turn away, which also proves the Istanbulians, who lived side by side with their neighbours for centuries, had no issue with them having another religion or customs¹⁰.

Also must be mentioned that following the sanctions of WWII, the right-wing government of 1942 has imposed a special property tax on Non-Muslims up to 75% for 2 years until 1944. This caused many Jewish and Greek businessmen to leave the city right after the war has ended.

Even though the demolitions and new city plans were not directly targeted to also demolish the Non-Muslim ethnic groups, nonetheless had exactly that effect. By building new large boulevards to open up the city, these enclosed Non-Muslim neighbourhoods were to become divided, which ended up

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causing inhabitants to feel like the minority, also divided and unsafe.

As a result, a considerable part of the original, yet Non-Muslim Istanbulites had become the underdogs.

They did the only thing they could to survive, they fled. In total; 1004 businesses, 110 Hotels, 27 pharmacies, 23 schools, 21 factories, 73 churches and cemeteries as well as over 4000 houses owned by Greeks were destroyed or burned down¹¹. Therefore the cosmopolitan and welcoming vibe of the city has changed remarkably. Those vacant properties -mainly of timber- in the historical center of Istanbul, has then embraced the recent immigrants.



Fig.8 : Events of September the 6th, Istanbul, 1955



Fig.9 : Military intervention to the mobs, Beyoglu, Events of September the 6th, 1955

The Second Boomers

Following the coup and military government between 1960-1963, the new civil government faced a different set of political and economic challenges. The era was marked by political instability, which lasted through the '70s.

In the '70s, one of the two major events - which has had a drastic impact in urbanism in Istanbul - was the building of the Bosphorus Bridge. It was the fourth-longest suspension bridge in the World upon its completion in 1973. The idea of building a bridge over the Bosphorus was not new, Herodotus speaks of a floating bridge in his stories from ca 500BC and more recently, the idea was proposed to Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid by the Bosphorus Railroad Company in 1900 which also included a rail system. Yet, WWI broke out and all further plans were suspended.

The person who re-introduced the idea to the modern Turkish Republic, not surprisingly, was PM Adnan Menderes in 1957. Yet again, with civil unrest followed by the coup, he never had the time to realize this grand project.

Only by the end of the '60s, a contract for the building of the bridge was signed¹². Construction started in 1970 and the bridge opened for use in October 30th, 1973 (50th anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Republic). If we were to look for a sign to when the second grand wave of immigration to the city started, completion of the bridge would be a very safe bet.

The 2nd major event of the '70s is for undoubtedly, the Turkish military interference on Cyprus Island. As mentioned earlier, political instability was not exclusively a part of the Turkish Republic in the '60s and '70s, but occurred also in the neighbouring countries, mainly Greece. The Greek coup d'état in 1967 -Junta Dictatorship lasted 7 years, until 1974- this particularly had an effect on Turkey, as these two countries shared not only the Aegean Sea but also a common history and unbreakable bonds with each other. After the military interference, which turned out to be a costly war on both economies, Cyprus was divided into two parts; the North Cyprus Turkish Republic and South Cyprus governed by the Greek population. Followed by these events and also infighting in the Greece mainland, the Junta rule in Greece collapsed.

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Fig.10 : Beginning of the construction, Bosphorus Bridge, 1970



Fig.11 : Opening Day of the Bosphorus Bridge, October 30th 19

“An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole World blind.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

War is, and never will be, a solution to any of World's problems. By the end of the Cyprus events, the Turkish economy has suffered yet another blow and ruling social-democrat party has lost the next elections to the conservative party, which then formed a coalition government with the nationalist front.

In late '70s Turkey was in an unstable situation; economically, politically and socially. The rise in oil prices and western industry products led to a drop in production. Turkey as a nation was transforming from a self-sufficient agriculture to a (partly) functioning half-automated industry economy, which resulted in having to import even wheat, a basic ingredient of bread, even though 60% of the people were still working in agriculture it was simply not enough to provide for the doubling population¹³.

Coalition governments were not effective, in the following elections of 1977, there was no winner. In 1978 the Democrats took the majority back because of a number of deputies shifting parties. In 1978 the Conservatives took charge again.

Meanwhile, conflicts between some political factions broke out, which led to immense violence. In 1977, a shooting in Taksim Square during Labour Day demonstrations on 1st of May has killed 35 people. A year later, in October, seven university students, who were members of the Turkish Workers' Party, were assassinated by an ultra-nationalist underground organization. The same year in December, over a hundred Alevi¹⁴ civilians fell victim to the same organization in Kahramanmaras. The nation was divided like never before through ethnicity, religious and political views; hostility and hatred roamed the unsafe streets.

On 12th of September 1980, General Kenan Evren declared a coup d'état on national television -after two years of consideration and watching violent events unfold uncontrolled by the state government-. The military has overthrown the civil government, suspended constitution and extended martial law throughout the country while banning all political parties and trade unions. Military rule lasted until the 7th of November 1982 when a new constitution was prepared by the generals – they passed around 800 new laws – which they put to a referendum. This new constitution was accepted with 92% of the vote.

In the midst of all these events, it would be unfair to blame architects and planners alike, for not planning Istanbul and other metropolitan cities in Turkey according to the demands and needs of the people. Yet, now the country is entering a new phase of existence; one supported by western funding (more frankly, debts). Concepts such as globalization, neo-liberal policies, new world order, single market, new regionalism and multinational companies have provided new opportunities to make Istanbul the financial capital of Turkey.

NOTES

¹ **TARDIS** - A time travel device from the cult Sci-fi TV Series, Doctor Who

² **Marshall Plan**: "In the immediate post-World War II period, Europe remained ravaged by war and thus susceptible to exploitation by an internal and external Communist threat... Fanned by the fear of Communist expansion and the rapid deterioration of European economies in the winter of 1946-1947, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act in March 1948 and approved funding that would eventually rise to over \$12 billion for the rebuilding of Western Europe.... The Marshall Plan generated a resurgence of European industrialization and brought extensive investment into the region. It was also a stimulant to the U.S. economy by establishing markets for American goods." - *US Department of State, Office of the Historian* - <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/marshall-plan>

³ Yerasimos S. and Vaner S., "Petite Chronique des Gecekondus," pp.151-154; p.152.

⁴ **TOKI** is Turkey's government backed housing agency. Founded in 1984, TOKI carries out projects and activities primarily throughout Turkey in line with the governments housing priorities

⁵ Millingen, "Constantinople", Encyclopaedia Britannica, p.8

⁶ Istanbulite : the term used to describe the residents of Istanbul before the immigration boom from Anatolia, borrowed from Caylar Keyser's book *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*, pp.37-51

⁷ Eminov, *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria*, p.79

⁸ Eminov, *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria*, p.79

⁹ Police Officer Tarik Berkan Tümerkan, Proceedings of High Court of Justice in Yassiada, Events of September the 6th -7th, p.260, published on Güven, *Events of September the 6th*, p.23

¹⁰ Memories of Dokdadis Donios, published on Güven, *Events of September the 6th*, p.24

¹¹ Dündar C., O Gün:6-7 Eylül 1955 [documentary]

¹² For the structural engineering work, a contract was signed with the British firm Freeman Fox & Partners in 1968. The bridge was designed by the British civil engineers Gilbert Roberts, William Brown and Michael Parsons, who also designed the Humber Bridge, Severn Bridge, and Forth Road Bridge.

¹³ Population Of Turkey, Turkish Institute of Statistics - http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?tb_id=39&ust_id=11 - Nationwide population 1945 - 19 Million to 1970 - 40 Million

¹⁴ **Alevi**s are an ethnic group found primarily in Turkey, who follow a different branch of Islam that is called Shia, than the Sunni majority. Alevi's make up between 10-25% of Turkey's population.

Chapter Two

“Power Lines”

Fast and Furious

CITY OF GOLD

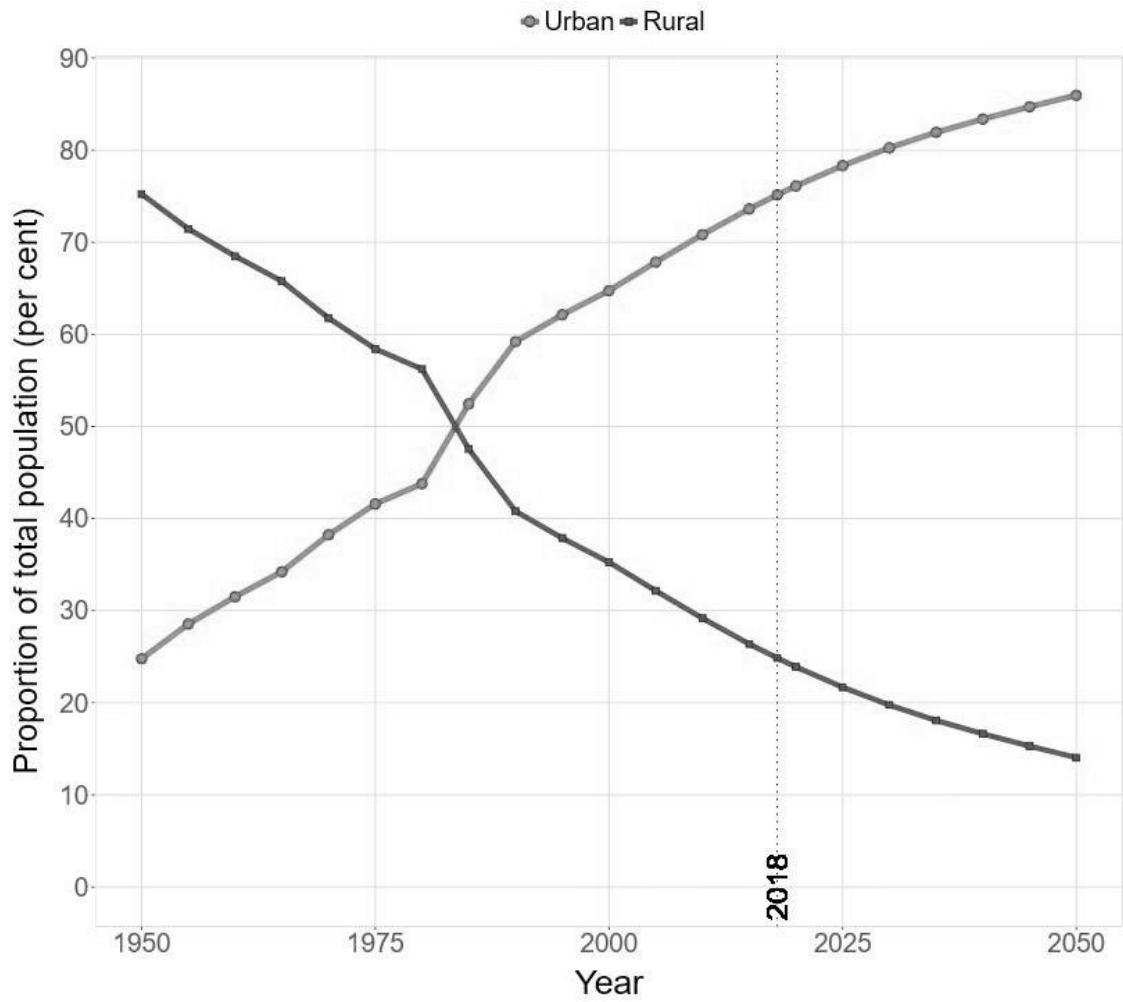


Fig.12 : Percentage of Population in urban and rural areas

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This period which starts with the '80s, as mentioned earlier represents a new era for both Turkey and the World. The most important changes -worldwide- may be, the adding of the word *globalization* to our vocabularies and dissolution process of the cold war. Nationwide, after the military intervention and following civil governments shadowed by said military rule, *outsourcing* has gained efficiency in politics, much like it was in the 1950s. During this period in which the fundamentals of change and reconstruction were determined, the USA was led by Reagan, the UK by Thatcher and Turkey by Özal; all of whom share similar World views, mainly about neo-liberalist capitalism and globalism.

It is possible to divide this period into two parts, the first stage is the decade following '80s into the '90s and secondly, after 1990 until today.

Since the '80s, Master Planning and studies have worked by eradicating, rather than following the previous one. This surprisingly unsustainable approach was labelled *modern* as everything made before 1980 was somehow considered *out of date*. Master Planning studies in the scale of 1/50000, which was conducted in June 1979 with the participation of the members of the High Council of General Directorate of Planning, has been approved one year later in June 1980. The goal of this master plan was; *“enhancing World- and countrywide known values of metropolitan Istanbul, while creating necessary functions and services for the city to develop and grow, compatible to Nation’s development and reconstruction.”*¹

There have been major changes in construction licenses and legislation in 1980, which had direct consequences on projects as well as design competitions. Preservation of Cultural and Natural Assets Law, Bogazici Law and the new Zoning Law had genuinely positive effects. Nonetheless, the new general Amnesty Law in reconstruction legitimized illegally built houses -predominantly in slums- as well as encouraged the denser and higher building in such manner.

The Amnesty Law states *“in cases of squatting and illegal settlements [...] detection and further planning and implementations of these areas can be made by district administrations. [...] In such necessary cases, standards and regulations of municipality master plans are not compulsory; however, the height of the building may not exceed 12,5m.”*²

Furthermore, with the new construction law that passed in 1985, preparing master plans were municipalities’ jurisdiction; yet implementation and

preparing 1/1000 scaled situation plans were transferred under the jurisdiction of district administrations³.

To sum up, the district administrations are allowed to prepare site plans which have the same attribute as the city master plans of the municipality. Thus, squatter/slum areas (with buildings as high as 12,5m = four floors) are not *visible* in the 1/50000 and 1/5000 scaled master plans of the municipality, but *exist* in reality and create a much higher density and effect social and technical infrastructure of the city.

As a result of these economic and political decisions, in the era between 1980 and 1990 brought a new approach to the spatial development of Istanbul; city limits kept expanding, as the existing settlements have grown and developed while new settlement areas have also formed. Undoubtedly, the Turkish Housing Development Association (*which will further be referred as TOKI*) has played a major part in these developments, not only in Istanbul but also in every major city in Turkey.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ISTANBUL'S URBAN FOOTPRINT

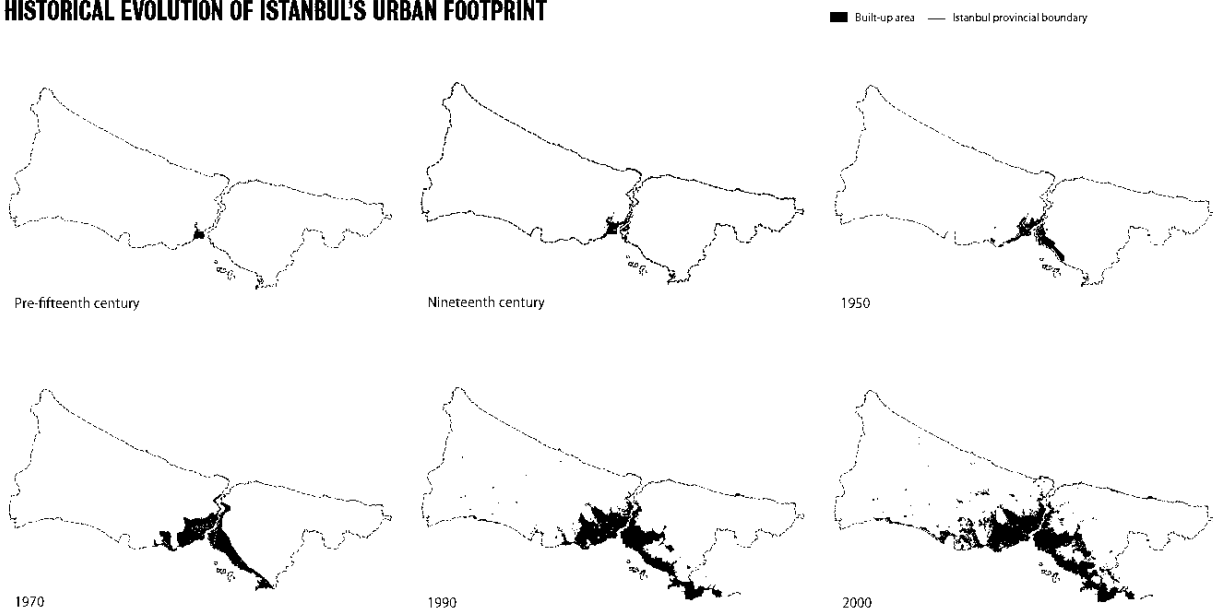


Fig.13 : Istanbul's Urban Footprint

Graphic by Urban Age Istanbul, Newspaper, London School of Economics and Political Science

"It has been accepted that housing is a human right since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Such right is included in Article 56 of Republic of Turkey Constitution as "Everybody has the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment" and in Article 57 as "Our State shall take measures to meet the housing need within the framework of a plan to observe the characteristics and environmental condition of the cities".

- opening statement, the Turkish Housing Development Association (TOKI)

The Mass Housing Law No. 2487, which was enacted in 1981, was the beginning of upcoming significant changes in terms of housing policies. The State showed a supportive attitude to the housing implementations and plans alike; the *Housing Development Administration* was established and a fund named *Public Housing Fund*, which was to receive 5% of the general government budget revenues, was established to finance the housing production.

With the Law no. 2487, the aim was to meet the housing needs of the cities by mass housing projects. A general roadmap was established in order to determine the principles and procedures. Law 2487 supports collective rather than individual housing projects and imposes some limitations on the use of the fund. Such as; *only the citizens who belong to the lower- or middle-income classes and who do not have a house belonging to them or their spouse or children may receive benefits from the fund, one can only benefit from the fund's financial resources once.* Additionally, the law states that *the residences may not be larger than 100 m².*⁴

Furthermore with Law No. 2487, a privilege was introduced to the housing cooperatives for the first time and the cooperatives were given priority on the land acquisition. The High Council of Housing was established, furthermore, construction savings system which has been implemented since 1951 by the Real Estate Credit Bank of Turkey, took place as a legal act. In this system, which worked as a grown-up version of a piggy bank, the person invests a certain amount of money, the amount of money invested or more is added by the bank and used for housing and/or construction expenses. The person therefore saves money solely for housing purposes.

Nevertheless, with all of its positive attributes, the Law No.2487 had a short-lived life, maybe because of the pressures from the shift of global politics

after 1980s or because of the pressures received internally from the private contractors -who mainly worked on a build-and-sell policy, they were ignored and made irrelevant by the law- resulted in Law No.2487 to receive an *update* in 1984.

On a side note, the law was never fully implemented to start with, as it never actually received the said 5% fund from the general budget.

In the new and updated Mass Housing Law⁵ (Nr:2985), the phrases "*housing needs will be compensated by the mass housing projects*", the conditions "*the persons who own a house may not benefit..*" and "*the persons should belong to a lower- income class*" were removed. The land acquisition privileges provided to housing cooperatives were not included in the new law. The resources of the Mass Housing Fund have been changed, the share that was previously intended to be given from the general budget has been removed and it is foreseen to use resources other than general budget revenues - a.k.a private funding -.The maximum size of the residences which was 100 m² has been raised to 150 m² , therefore it was made possible to build luxury housing with the public resources - which also created resources for private contractors (*build-and-sellers*), for the first time, they were added into the Law as one of the "housing providers".

Despite this negative change in the legal sense, the Mass Housing Fund is the largest fund in the history of the republic, which transferred large amount of financial aid to the housing projects.

To compare, the number of houses which were built with the loans provided⁶;

by *The Turkish Social Insurance Association* between the years of 1962-1987 was 203.000,

by *The Social Security Organization for Artisans and Self-Employed* was 45.000,

by *The Turkish Army Assistance Agency* was 55.000.

Before the Housing Development Fund was launched in 1980, the houses built by Government funding were only around 10.000 per year, this number reached its peak in 1987 with 157.000. The number of houses which were built with the loans provided by TOKI - only between the years of 1984 and 1999 - was totalling up to 1.130.000⁶.

In this period, the housing production by the cooperatives increased rapidly not just

in metropolitan cities but also throughout the country thanks to the loans provided by TOKI. While the share of the housing cooperatives in the housing production was around 5.22% in 1970, this ratio reached 15.8% in 1984 and 27% in 1989 with the support of TOKI. Therefore, TOKI has developed a functioning system by providing both financial resources and housing loans⁷.

Numbers speak for themselves and the influence of TOKI on the Turkish housing system is not to be ignored, yet such a drastic change must be addressed with caution. TOKI is a state-funded organization, so what was the intention of the state by contributing such a vast amount of investment into the housing system? The fact that the Law Nr.2487 was *revised* and reasons such as the privileges provided for private contractors, possibility or permits to build luxury apartments and using private funding instead of tax revenues all seem to confirm, that the government's intentions were not mainly to provide housing for low-income citizens and those in need but rather to revive the economy and provide funds for the building "players" in the housing construction business.

Moreover, additional permits and laws added to the system such as the housing production by TOKI itself (instead of providing just funding, TOKI started to act as a construction company), rehabilitation development plans (gentrification of slums with no or little regard on the lives of citizens who live in those areas), selling of the public land (privatisation) have all reorganized the distribution of urban land and power structures, also caused commercialization of the housing and land sector. In the end, TOKI by monopolizing all these rights became an institution of profit and an immense empire.

Probably one of the most negative aspects of these developments was that the local municipalities took almost no part in this planning process. Neither in Law Nr.2487 nor in the revised version Law Nr.2985 is there a statement related to the municipalities. Out of 975.000 residences which were built between the years 1984 and 1990, only 20.000 were in cooperation with the municipalities.

However, the municipality of Istanbul played a bigger part in the construction of high rise buildings. Under the direction of Bedrettin Dalan⁸, building permits provided for most of the skyscrapers built in the late '80s and throughout the '90s, which changed the face of Istanbul dreadfully.

This issue with *two-headedness* which was published on one particular news

story on one of Turkey's most popular Newspapers Milliyet in 1990, clearly present the state chaos Istanbul was dragged into. The following statement by an Architect named Doruk Pamir⁹;

*“I want to see Skyscrapers in Istanbul. When a city with 500.000 people suddenly explodes into 7 million, we must look for new solutions. This is a type of a building and it is a valid type of a building. There are no countries or any metropolises which don't have skyscrapers anymore. This is a building type which was constructed by reality”*¹⁰

pinpoints naturally where the idea comes from; growing population, yet fails to grasp the consequences of such a “valid type of building” in terms of, well, everything. Contradicting this statement, (then) head of the municipality Nurettin Sözen claims that the *unplanned construction* of skyscrapers bring many problems caused by the lack of infrastructure and damaging the view of the city. Protests which were not heard, apparently, and now we face those consequences many times over, 30 years later.

As a conclusion, it is safe to say that Istanbul became a heaven -or a playground per se- by the '90s, for people with enough financial capabilities as they could build anything they wanted almost anywhere and make a tremendous amount of profits. Even though some steps were taken to understand the process of planning a multi-million city, local administrations either didn't have enough influence on the process and the governments were content with the reviving economy and cash flow. After all, the problems of the future were to be dealt with by the people of the future.



Fig.14 : Süzer Plaza, Besiktas, Istanbul

One of the most discussed skyscrapers in Istanbul, designed by the architect Doruk Pamir. He claims his design was altered and 1/3 of the height was simply cut, resulting in lack of proportion and “ugliness”, therefore an object of dislike by many. Yet, the story is not that simple. Süzer Plaza is built on a land which was dubbed “construction cannot be done” by the last Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II. ; it is on a valley which was meant to be preserved as green parks and gardens, yet a businessman named Mustafa Süzer bought the land which was privately owned by many others and became the single landowner in a large area. Then, the status of the land was altered firstly in 1983 by Istanbul’s Cultural and Natural Assets Protection Board (ironically) and was given 24,5m high building permit.

Followingly, the permit was raised to 135m by the head of the municipality Bedrettin Dalan (Nurettin Sözen’s predecessor) –this is where Pamir gets involved with his design for a skyscraper, as he claims he planned a 135m building-, construction started in 1987. In 1989 the permit was revoked by Nurettin Sözer(then head of Municipality of Istanbul), construction came into a halt, yet he encountered resistance from the government. Finally, after some back and forth court stand-downs between the municipality and the government, the government won by adjusting some technicalities to serve this exact purpose. Now stands on a green valley with one of the World’s most beautiful view over the Bosphorus; a grotesque 154m high skyscraper with 34 floors and home to a luxury hotel: Ritz Carlton.

Praised and loved, presumably only by the landowner, businessman Mustafa Süzer.



Fig.15 : Front page of Milliyet Newspaper, February 2nd, 1990

Translation :

Headline : Trend of Skyscrapers

Subheadline : Started to grow like mushrooms

Main Story: Istanbul is to become a city of skyscrapers. While in some districts 34 to 40 story buildings rise, 50 to 55 story buildings are waiting for the building permit. Municipality of Istanbul opposes skyscrapers as they claim there isn't enough infrastructure to support these buildings and they damage the view of the city.

Photo Caption (bottom left) : Just like New York; Skyscrapers which grow like mushrooms reminds us of New York

NOTES

¹ Suher, *Planning Issues of Istanbul*, 17

² New Zoning Law a.k.a. Amnesty Law – Nr.2981- February 24th,1984 – <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2981.pdf>

³ Construction/Civil Law – Nr.3194 – May 3rd,1985 – <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.3194.pdf>

⁴ The Mass Housing Law – Nr:2487 – July 8th, 1981 <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/17396.pdf>

⁵ The Mass Housing Law – Nr:2985 – March 2nd, 1984 <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2985.pdf>

⁶ Karasu- *Belediyelerin Konut Politikalarında Yeri, Belediye-Kooperatif-Toplu Konut İdaresi İşbirliği Modeli*,p. 39

⁷ Karasu, *Nasil bir Toplu Konut İdaresi?* , pp.459 & 460

⁸ **Bedrettin Dalan:** Head of the Municipality of Istanbul, 1984-1989, Member of the Anavatan Party (which was the party in power in parliament after the coup of 1980.They ruled as single party between 1983-1991, and were able to pass series of laws with little to no resistance)

⁹ **Doruk Pamir:** Turkish Architect, studied in Middle East Technical University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the `60s. He is the architect of one of the most controversial skyscrapers in Istanbul: Süzer Plaza (Sky-cage as named by the citizens).

¹⁰ Trend of Skyscrapers,Milliyet Newspaper, 02.02.1990, accessed on <https://emlakkulisi.com/1990-yilinda-istanbul-gokdelenler-sehri-oluyormus/356023>

Chapter Three

“Homegrown Revolution”

I Build, Therefore I Am

CITY OF GOLD

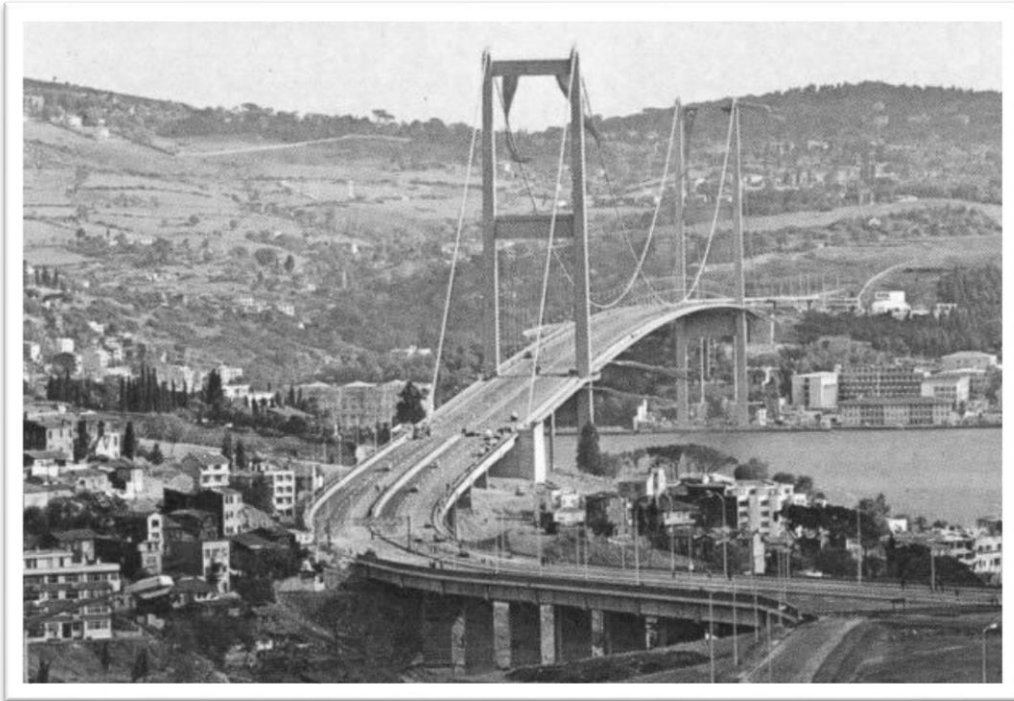


Fig.16 : Bosphorus Bridge, October 30th 1973, the day after the opening



Fig.17 : Bosphorus Bridge, October 31st 2013

A picture speaks louder than words. Looking at Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge 40 years apart from the same spot indeed says a lot. Even though the land was supposed to be a "protected area" (tr. SIT area)¹, profits that can be made were presumably too great to ignore and therefore it fell victim to concretization².

As we enter the '90s in the storyline, we can assume that the second phase of previously mentioned new World period has started and is continuing until this day.

Due to the economic conditions of the country as well as the rapid development and population growth in the vicinity of Istanbul, traffic on the highways connecting the city to the Bosphorus Bridge and the Bosphorus Bridge itself, increased significantly above the expected level. The average daily traffic was 32520 vehicles per day for the first service year of the Bosphorus Bridge in 1974. These predictions have exceeded the normal capacity limit in 1987 with 130000 vehicles per day, in the 14th year of service. It was clear that one bridge connecting this mega city was not enough.

This rippling effect caused by the bridge isn't only limited to the highways but also on the land in close proximity, as mentioned earlier. As the single opportunity to cross to the other side of the city, Bosphorus Bridge and the area surrounding had become a hot spot where settlements, industrial factories and business centers were all expanding around it, horizontally.

With the building of the second bridge on the Bosphorus, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge -named after the Ottoman Sultan who conquered Istanbul-caused further expansion, connecting both sides also vertically, in North-South axis, while the area between two bridges gained twice the more attention. With the economic power brought by international enterprises, privatization and local businessmen who added considerable amounts to their bank accounts thanks to the latest developments in the country, have also gotten wiser. This time, not only illegal squatter settlements (gecekondu-s) but also wealthy gated communities as well as shopping malls started to invade the forest land. FSM Bridge which is located to the north of the Bosphorus Bridge, has moved the finance center also further north, while *"the industrial factories were moved further away to the outskirts in order to exploit cheap labor and the city would be turned into a consumer heaven inhabited by service and finance sector workers"* ³

CITY OF GOLD

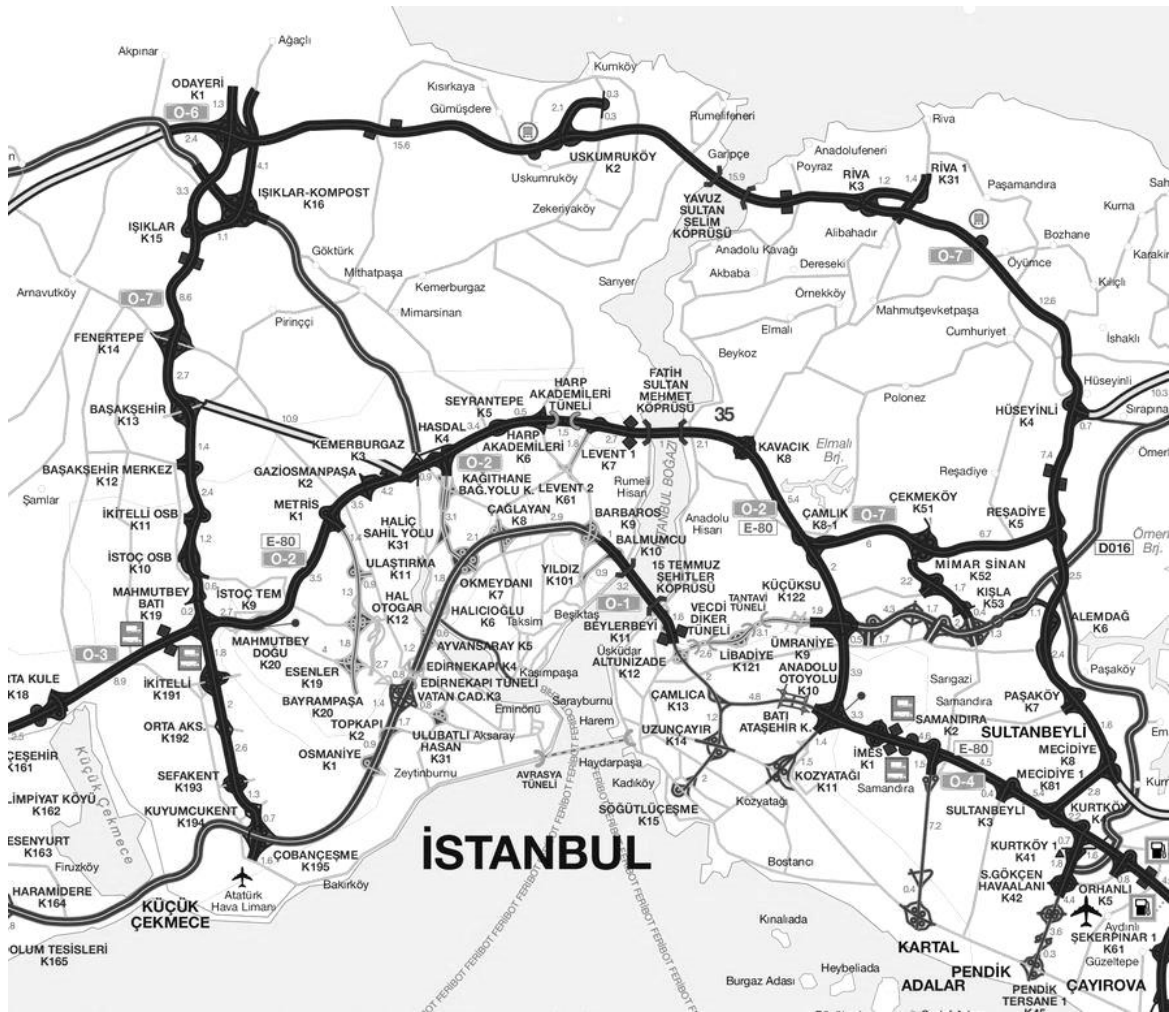


Fig. 18: Map of Istanbul's Highways

This uncontrollable trend of invading forest land while expanding city limits viciously continued into the 2000s. By the time, Istanbul was officially being marketed as a global city; luxurious shopping malls with world-known brands were opening shops, global companies were setting their headquarters to manage their Middle East, Balkan and Caucasian branches, the number of the gated communities with high walls separating them from the very neighbourhood they live in, were rising.

The New Elites

“The traditional city has been killed by rampant capitalist development, a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of over accumulating capital driving towards endless and sprawling urban growth no matter what the social, environmental, or political consequences.”⁴

- David Harvey

In such a rapidly growing city, it is expected that different social classes would want to live in different conditions. Following the economic growth and changes in the political environment, a new social class has ensued in the late '80s; they had specific demands and means to pay for it, so the market responded.

This is exactly the case of, one of Istanbul's most prestigious and luxurious gated communities in Göktürk - Kemerburgaz area, located in the north of Istanbul. Until the beginning of the '90s Göktürk was a small village in close vicinity to Istanbul, approximately half an hour drive from the city center (in an optimistic case when there is no traffic). Before too long, the potential of the village was discovered by the real estate moguls and with the rising demand, the village was transformed into a gated and mostly self-sufficient luxury community, consisting of villas and apartment buildings.

In the first half of the '90s, the community was not as exclusive as it is today. The signs of the rural village it once was, was still visible; luxury villas and old regular village houses stood side by side. Yet, not for too long.

The Beginning of 2000s also marks the peak in popularity of Göktürk community.



Fig.19 : Gated Community of Göktürk

Istanbulites who were bothered by the city's disorderly ways sought refuge in unspoiled nature and peace, living safely tucked in by high walls. These new villagers quickly built their own life inside; their own supermarkets, schools, hospitals, banks, cinemas and any and every other constitution which can be found in the city center were made available for this community, so much so that they could live and sustain their "big city life" inside their walls.

Even though gated communities started out as highly prestigious and therefore only available to the high-income classes, with rising demands from the middle class, gated communities have started to spread rapidly through the whole city. Characteristics of such gated communities, as mentioned with the Göktürk Community, consist of not just having 24/7 security and gated walls but also social facilities and attractive free spaces. Yet when one wants to have all of these and live in the middle of the city, one has to compromise on some of those demands; meaning more space for apartments to fit as many residents as possible, and therefore sacrificing green spaces. Thus, new housing projects, in the depths of Istanbul started to gain popularity in the mid '2000s.

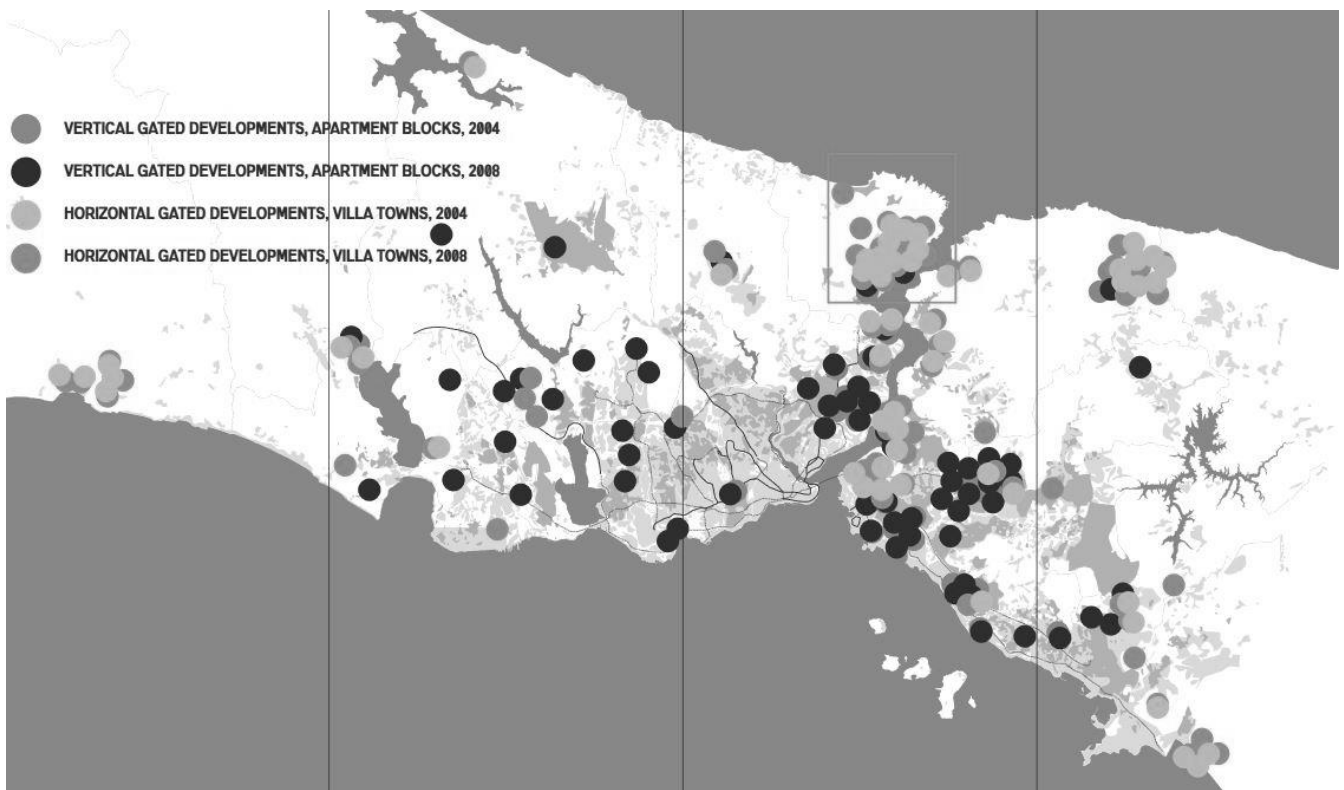
Global economies, too, derive power from a supply and demand chain. In 2001, much like the rest of the World, Turkey also had a setback in economic expansion. The coalition government –consisting of both left and right parties- had managed to get the crisis under control and had already ensured a 10% expansion in economy for the coming year. However, the tension caused by the economic crisis in the past years and disputes in the government led to the snap election of November 2002, giving a new party in Turkish politics (AKP) time to shine and old ones to perish. From then until today (2019), AKP has held the majority vote in all elections and therefore is the main decision maker of Turkey; as they can pass laws with little opposition in the parliament. It is safe to assume that for the last 17 years they have built the new face of Istanbul and the whole country.

In order to understand and analyze the motives behind providing Istanbul with gated communities, we must first understand how they function. A group of researchers⁵ from Istanbul Technical University has divided these gated communities into four types.

I) Gated towers in the city center, which appeal to high-income groups

II) Gated villa towns which appeal to middle/high and high-income groups

III) Gated apartment blocks in the close perimeter of the city center that attract high to middle-income groups



*Fig.20 : Map of Gated Communities in Istanbul
Graphic by Diwan (collaborative research platform)*

IV) Mixed settlements, also in the close perimeter to the city center that attract high to middle-income groups

As it can be summarized from the results of comprehensive studies, target groups of gated communities were majorly high and middle/high-income groups.

Thanks to the economic prosperity -gained by the foreign investments and privatization- which took Turkey by storm: the lion's share of this income was invested in the construction sector. Banks gave mortgage credits with very low rates, real estate developers and contractors used fairy tale like advertisements and consumers with the dream of a perfect home filled the market.

In the midst of a quite literal construction boom, demand was extremely high and so was the amount of money in the business. This gave birth to a new group of *builders*, who have shaped Istanbul in the last 15 years, called the "contractors". Any person can become a contractor in Turkey and the law or the lack of inspection hasn't changed even though there have been many casualties caused by the wrongdoings of contractors.

To clarify, here is a not-so-hypothetical tale of a contractor:

Step One: In the morning, you call yourself a Contractor and you go to an area of your choosing, you would probably look for a densely built area or an up-and-coming neighbourhood and you start searching for the land owners. After that, you will try to convince the owners of that land (or the building) to give you the *right of use*. If everyone gives three apartments, you will give four; it's a bargain. In most cases, the owner of the land gives you the right of use of the land with a contract, as he has not lost any money or his property is not in danger. So the landowners aren't frauded in any way, they are just happy after a good trade as they will have a newly built apartment building on their land.

Step Two: Now you have signed the land contract, you need a rendering (photorealistic image from a 2D or 3D model) for the building. You will seek an architect to create a virtual model of the apartments; at this state its only about the efficiency in using time and space (the land), no time for field research or concepts - a sad reality for architects; which also explains why there are so many identical looking apartments in Turkey's major cities; architects just end up using the same floor plan with minor adjustments and

produce projects in a copy/paste manner-.

Step Three: You launch the renderings of these apartments with a catchy advertisement; online, radios, newspapers and billboards... These apartments are offered for sale from the ground. So far, you've only paid for the ad.

Step Four: Here comes an average citizen, burning with the dream of being the first owner of a brand new and modern house. You will give a nice discount, maybe up to 5-10 thousand liras with a condition; you require 40% of the price of an apartment in advance, it's the contract fee. If you think people don't trust you, you're wrong. All your apartments will be sold in 1-2 weeks and your bank accounts will be swollen.

Step Five: Now, you're not getting enough revenue to complete the construction of your building with this money. But 50-60% of the work is done. Meantime you reach the owners of the apartment and ask for a 30% additional payment. What do you think happens, since they already paid 40% and there is a construction proceeding and they want to move into their new house as soon as possible? That additional 30% is wired immediately to your bank account.

Happy Ending: Upon completion, you still have the remaining 30% payment from the new landlords. From the morning you woke up and decide to become a contractor to this final point, you have a 30% profit. Not a bad deal at all!

According to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, as of 2011, the number of people with a contracting business was around 135.000. In 2012, new regulations brought to the industry and everyone who wanted to become a contractor had to apply for a certificate which was provided by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, yet this certificate program is only useful to take contractors under legal registration (to refrain them from committing tax fraud, in my opinion) as no actual training is provided nor an examination of qualification. In order to obtain the authorization certificate, it is sufficient to fill the application form for the contractor number (similar to a social security number but specific for contractors) and submit the application form and a copy of the identity card to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization⁶.

CITY OF GOLD



Fig.21 : Fikirtepe, Istanbul

After the regulations changed, the number of contractors kept increasing by 66.000 in 2012 and 47.000 in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Even though in 2014, there has been a decline in the number of the sold property, the number of people who were applying for the contractor's license was oddly still on the rise.

In comparison: Germany with 80 Million citizens, have 3800 contractors (or contractor businesses). This number is only between 20.000 and 30.000 in entire Europe. The Minister of Environment and Urbanization stated⁷ in a speech at Smart Building Technologies and Electrical Systems Fair in 2017 that there were 450.000 contractors in Turkey. Even though he addressed the situation as worrisome and promised to bring new regulations, only the future will show what they can accomplish or if those regulations will have any effect at all.

The effects of this uncontrollable pace of "I build, therefore I am" mentality were seen quite positive in the beginning; the sector has provided many jobs not just in the constructing business itself but also in industries which provide raw material for constructions (such as steel and brick production) as well as side sectors such as advertisement, real estate and banking. Yet the negative effects were somehow ignored, but not for long.

The Exiles

*"Decades of systematic under-investment in housing and urban infrastructure, combined with grotesque subsidies for speculators, permissive zoning for commercial development, the absence of effective regional planning and ludicrously low property taxes for the wealthy have ensured an erosion of the quality of life for the middle classes in older suburbs as well as for the inner city poor."*⁸

- Mike Davis

The quote from Mike Davis is might as well be about Istanbul, yet it's about another city: Los Angeles, which is also a victim to lack of planning and neo-liberalism. Much like LA, it is also *easy to envision Istanbul reproducing itself endlessly across the land*⁹, yet the value of the city center and historic peninsula will not change, just like the demand for housing.



Fig.22 Ayazma “Gecekonu” District, with the –then- newly built Olympic Stadium in the Background

As the gated communities kept sprouting all around, the city continued to be built more and more densely; economy booming and globalization train going at full speed, real estate investors and contractors kept watching Istanbul just like a pet watching its owners prepare food, drooling for more. This situation gave birth to a new term which rose to popularity quite rapidly: urban renewal.

At this point in the mid-2000s, Istanbul advanced to being successfully marketed. Working class and other low-income class had partially moved outside of the city for more affordable accommodation as the rents were cheaper further away from the center, yet there were still specific areas where the ownership belonged to said groups; thanks to the zoning laws of the past, slums were partially legitimised and the inhabitants were the locals and the landowners living in those areas since decades. However under the name of renewal, they had to be pushed away in order to make space for investments and new capital.

One of the most striking cases of said forced evictions happened in the *Ayazma* (which was predominantly home to Kurdish ethnic groups) and *Tepeüstü* (which was predominantly home to Turkish ethnic groups) districts of Istanbul. The residents of these districts were forcefully removed from their homes and relocated in one of the TOKI settlements, named *Bezirganbahce*, outside of the city skirts. The neighbourhoods and families who lived next to each other for years were scattered along high apartment blocks, it wasn't just their houses that were demolished but also their social relationships.

History repeats itself. Much like the first beautification project conducted in Istanbul in the '50s, when Non-Muslim neighbourhoods were being sliced through with new boulevards and gentrification projects, 50 years later much similar arrangements were being made, this time the residents were not being targeted per se, but the land they lived on.

In 2009, UN-Habitat commissioned its Advisory Group for Forced Evictions on a mission in Istanbul Metropolitan Region. During their visits, they were able to build a close relationship with people who were affected and their observations and interviews are put together on report¹⁰, yet also a widely accessible Documentary named "Ecumenopolis: Endless City"¹¹, which will be majorly recited in the following chapters as we, once again, have to use the power of film in order to time travel.

“Ayazma is a small neighbourhood in Küçükçekmece, Istanbul. It’s also a living testament to Neo-Liberal policies, it’s a testament to capitalists seeing the city as a place for speculation. It’s a testament to the results of globalization and to land having a material value. This area became valuable after the Olympic Stadium was built. And thus, a neighbourhood far from sight, far from infrastructure and municipal services, an area not even given a district status (or recognized) by the state, suddenly becomes valuable. The inhabitants here are forced to migrate so that the area could be transformed into a luxury housing or whatever. But in the end, people here will be completely ignored on architectural drawings on paper, claiming they will make things better and more beautiful. On the contrary, people here are suffering while the city is divided up (into shares)” ¹²

- Cihan Uzuncarsili Baysal

Her guess on turning the area into a *“luxury housing or whatever”* was very accurate. Two years later, Ali Agaoglu, one of Turkey’s most famous -as well as one of the richest- contractors, announced his new project located in Ayazma and started selling apartments and *“dreams”* which weren’t even built yet, while advertising the project on TV spots with following catchy phrases :

*“[...] We’re creating a new living center with 3100 homes, with 87% green areas; there will even be a golf course in it. I always dreamed of gardens on the tenth floor, now I made them, they’ll exist! Because everyone in Turkey deserves to live in a beautiful, good quality house with a swimming pool[...]Here (while showing the renderings from the upcoming project) will be swimming pools, here a square and even a mall, there is everything. There is life! [...]Everyone with 10.000 Liras of down payment can have an apartment here, we even started building! (a wide lens shot of a flat fundament) ”*¹³

- Ali Agaoglu

The advertisement ends with a catchy motto:
“with 10.000 cash, you get the flat”

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Fig.23 : Rendering Image of Ayazma My World Europe Project by Agaoglu

Even though we have previously cracked the code on how to be a contractor in Turkey and how they operate, this particular TV spot never ceases to amaze. Mr. Agaoglu may have become a millionaire by doing his job and he alone isn't to blame for the damages his projects caused Istanbul. In order to realize such projects vastly out of touch with their surroundings –both in a material and also spiritual manner-, he still operates with the permission from the municipalities, therefore under the authority of the Turkish State. He also wouldn't be able to continue his work unless he was making money from it. The project sold 1200 housing (villa and apartments) shares in the first two weeks after it was launched, setting a new record¹⁴. He is a smart man who figured out how people's minds click, by saying “*everyone deserves to live in a house with a swimming pool*” he plays with the subconscious need of people who want to be perceived as rich, since having a swimming pool by no doubt is a sign of luxury and high class. He also presents the idea of having a rooftop/balcony garden as his long-lasting dream and indicating he made something which never existed before – clearly to the people unaware of the architectural trends of the era and examples such as Bosco Verticale – thus swaying potential buyers into owning a one of a kind “dream came true”.

Nevertheless, the most bothering statement he makes on the TV spot, in my opinion, is none of the above. What really draws the line is when he, after lining up all the pleasantries such as 87% green areas and golf courses and swimming pools, indicates that these are things that make a “*life*”, therefore overlooking entirely the fact that there was life there all along, yet those lives were simply destroyed to make room for the new “*luxury lives*”.

The residents of Ayazma underwent three forced migrations, as we know of.

Firstly, they were forced to migrate to Istanbul in order to find work, as the factories in the periphery of their villages in the east of Turkey were either closed down or were reduced in employee numbers. In order to provide for the needs of metropole cities of Turkey, most of the industry, food or otherwise, is located in the close perimeter of such metropole areas. A chain reaction as mentioned earlier which is not specific for the people of Ayazma but rather for most of the residents in Istanbul's squatter districts.

Secondly, they were forced to move to the TOKI Social Housing in Bezirganbahce, when the urban renewal project in Ayazma took effect.

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Fig 24: Distance between Ayazma Squatter Settlement and TOKI Housing in Bezirganbahce

People of Ayazma mostly worked minimum wage jobs in the factories close to their homes, with little to no social security. When they moved to Bezirganbahce, an area which by the time had a very poor public transport system, they have either lost their jobs or spent a considerable part of their wages on the commuter fares. The flats they “owned” in the social housing project of TOKI, of course, did not come for free. They had to pay a monthly fee of approximately 1/3 of a minimum wage, which although seems like a fair amount for owning a flat, for these people who already lived in poverty in their squatter settlements, it was just not sustainable¹⁵.

Finally, most of the people who were relocated to Bezirganbahce, -partly because they couldn't afford the flats and their mortgages or because of the rising social tension between Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups in the new settlement -, sold their flats to cover their debts and moved to other areas in the periphery and built new “gecekondu”.

Squatter settlements have been an inseparable part of Istanbul's history, they were even encouraged by the governments in the past; as the residents paid their taxes in the form of votes.

It is often said that the “gecekondu” areas always neglected by the government, deprived of infrastructure and basic services. Yet it must be remembered that such services provided by the municipalities and the government, is actually what we get in exchange for paying taxes. Since the illegal settlements often don't pay any property taxes and the new settlements can both pay in coin and in votes, it's a no brainer that what happened in Ayazma was not the first and surely won't be the last.

As such, even though it is unfair to put all the blame on the governments alone - they are, in the end, elected by the people- yet we must admit, they are still accountable for the living situation of its citizens, which is one of their basic human rights. As a conclusion, in today's Neo-Liberal World, it is not viable to talk about a Social State in Turkey.

“Can a global city be planned? Maybe. But can it be planned separately from the rest of the country? This is where the problem starts. Because you haven't created alternative development centers, you can't prevent migration. And if you haven't prevented migration, you won't be able to plan Istanbul or cope with its effects.”¹⁶

- Mustafa Sönmez

The Nuances

Humans are adaptable creatures. We can survive in many conditions, from a desert climate to the Arctic, from highest point on Mount Everest to deepest of oceans, may it be with the help of technology or purely stamina and hard work, there is almost no place on Earth where humans won't survive. When we damage Mother Nature too vastly in the process and she claims back what we took from her thoughtlessly, we still rebuild. We always rebuild.

Yet, there are some things we cannot rebuild, such as the *time*. Once it's gone, it is gone forever and there is nothing we can do to bring it back. For this reason, we must cherish our historical heritage and protect it as much as we can and that applies to historical buildings, too.

"We will be the kings of this city!" is what the Bakircioglu family says on *The Birds of Exile*, one of the first Yesilcam Movies which tells the story of immigration from rural Anatolia to Istanbul. Background to the first scenes of the film, just like in many other stories -real or fictional- is the historical Haydarpaşa Train Station; a gateway to hope and dreams.

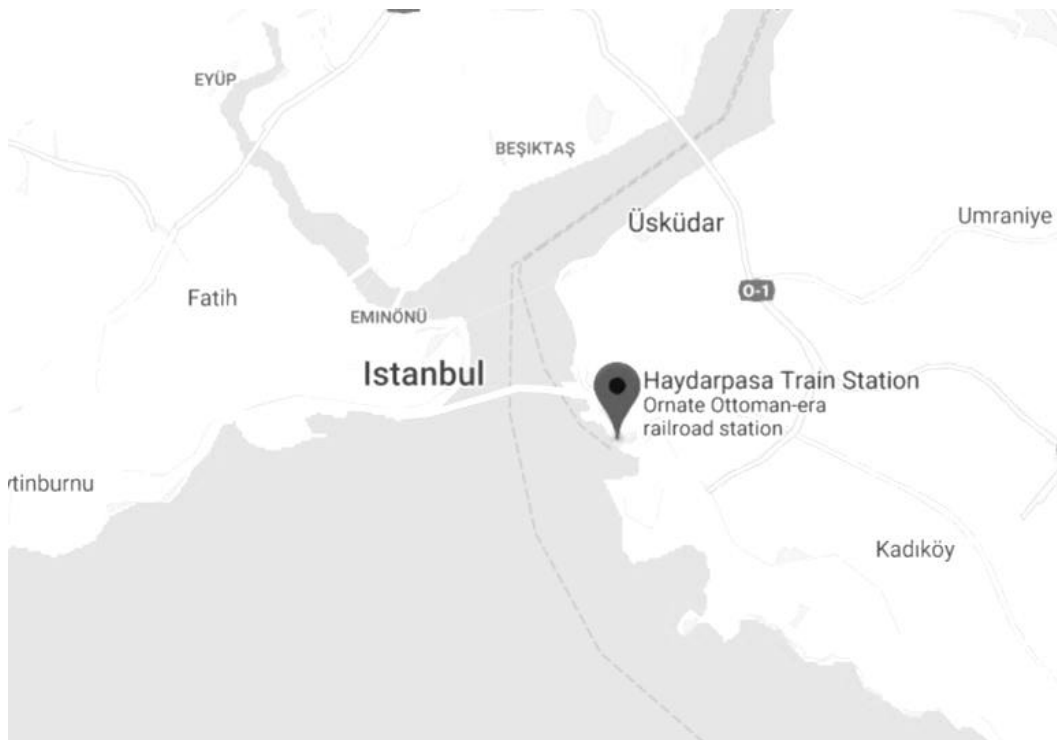


Fig. 25 : Location of Haydarpaşa Train Station

The station has been an important symbol of Istanbul for a century. It was opened as the first station of Baghdad – Istanbul railway line in 1908, was used as armoury during the WWI and was sabotaged because of it; located right where the Bosphorus ends and opens up to the Marmara Sea - therefore quite open to the busy sea traffic -, in 1979 it took some damage from a marine accident.

Yet the most disruptive of all the damages it took, was the fire in 2010.

The events leading up to the fire seem to give us some clues on why and what might have actually happened to one of Turkey's most iconic buildings of all time.

In December 2004, news headlines started circulating: "Haydarpaşa to become new Manhattan". During "Future Scenarios for Istanbul Municipality" meeting, authorities who work for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Department of Research and Planning Coordination have answered "*Such a project is not on the agenda and press coverage should not be credited.*"¹⁷

In March 2005, Kadir Topbas (of AKP), the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, declared that they were "bringing Istanbul to the market" at the International Cannes Real Estate Fair. Among twenty concept projects which were launched; one of them was the Haydarpaşa Station and Port Area Transformation.

In the beginning of April in the same year, Chamber of Turkish Engineers and Architects decided to form a civil campaign group, in order to raise public awareness for the project which was being kept as a secret. As mentioned earlier, the station holds a sentimental value for almost everyone who arrived in Istanbul by train, therefore not surprisingly, the campaign soon gained remarkable support. In late April though, the government passed a new bill to give all rights of use of the land which the station is built on, to the Turkish Railways Department. This only meant one thing, without any further investigation, TRD could rent the land as they saw fit (for example, they could make a sublet contract for 99 years) and soon after the new project with the aim of turning the historical train station into a "World Trade Center with Seven Towers" was made public¹⁸. Furthermore, it became clear that a deal was made even one and a half years before the new law came into power and design process was already in motion.



Fig. 26 : Haydarpaşa Railway Station

Fast forwarding to April 2006, the area surrounding the station was declared SIT area¹. In June same year, The Ministry of Culture sent the decision back to the Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board for re-discussion. However, the Committee decided that its decision was correct and hence, it would not change. Yet in July, on the third floor of this historical landmark –as is, also stated in the law- an illegal construction activity started. Following the complaints of the Chamber of Architects, the construction came to a halt for the time being.

The long-lasting showdown between the Municipality (therefore the government) and the people was far from being over. In July 2007, the Turkish Railways Department sued the decision made by the Heritage Preservation Board, in order to declare the area *suitable for urban renewal projects*, thus far with no success. A year after, in July 2008, the Municipality declared that a company named BIMTAS –which is a private company backed by the municipality- will conduct a study in order to prepare a 1/5000 scaled Master Plan with the purpose of preserving the Haydarpaşa Area, which is planned to be a *3D zoning plan* –first in planning law and literature- and it will be put into motion only after it is presented to the Heritage Preservation Board.

A year later in October 2009, the new zoning plan was given approval of Municipality directly –without being submitted to the Heritage Preservation Board- and by taking the majority of the votes in municipality council, the plan was approved. If events would follow a democratic and lawful order, that precise zoning plan should be open for public access immediately after it was approved. Yet, for one year, the citizens were kept in the dark. The Chamber of Turkish Engineers and Architects therefore sued the administration and even though the lawsuit was created after the complaints of the Chamber, they nonetheless weren't recognized as the prosecutor and therefore legally were cut from the process.

On November 28th 2010 at 14:30, the roof of Historic Haydarpaşa Train Station caught fire. The flames and black clouds covered the Bosphorus Sky and both of Haydarpaşa's iconic clocks stopped working at 15:17.

“[...]After the fire, it was seen that there were deficiencies, as in both delays and in method about the intervention. The fire broke out on 14:15 according to the citizens living in the area and was intervened about 45 minutes after. This fire could be extinguished in 30 minutes, but it was extinguished in 2 and a half hours.”¹⁹



Fig. 27 : Fire at the Haydarpaşa Railway Station, November 28th 2010

It later came to surface that two days before the fire, illegal “restoration” work had started in the station and the company that conducted the restoration had actually been a *cleaning service company*²⁰. Under normal circumstances, it is unacceptable for cleaning personnel to drive a single nail through a regular building’s wall, let alone conducting roof repairs on a historical landmark.

Following the fire, in January 2011, the Turkish Railway Department published the bid on the restoration works and the contracts were signed as it became inevitable after the fire had destroyed the roof of the building. The 1/5000 scaled Master Plan with the purpose of preserving Haydarpaşa Area reappeared in November 2011 and was swiftly approved by the municipality.

On July 19th, 2013, the last train left the Haydarpaşa Station.

Since then, owners of the cleaning company who conducted the restoration work and two employees who were at the site that day, were sentenced to ten months in jail for causing the fire.

The legal showdown between the government and the people still continues to this day. But the speculation which started back in 2003 by the AKP government and their success of getting what they wanted against all opposition, has plainly proved that, to them, preservation of historic values or keeping the quality of urban life for the citizens are, compared to the profit that can be made from the land, nothing but nuances.

NOTES

¹ SIT area: In order to preserve natural values and to transfer them to the next generations, rare areas with historical and beauties in Turkey are referred to as the SIT area. There three types of SIT areas, firstly, the natural SIT; belongs to prehistoric and historical periods, found rare and are unique in terms of features and beauties. The natural SIT is divided into three categories by degree. Secondly, the archaeological SITs, these are settlements and areas where all kinds of cultural assets reflect the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the periods in which they lived. These archaeological SITs can be found underground, above ground and under water. Archaeological SITs areas are also divided into three degrees. Lastly, the Historic SITs are defined by important historical events in terms of national history and military warfare, they are the areas to be protected as is, with all their natural structure and surroundings.

² Concretisation is a term used widely in discussions in Turkey about the fast trend of building.

³ Azem I., Ecumenopolis: City Without Limits [Documentary] min.7

⁴ Harvey, Rebel Cities, pp.15-16

⁵ Akgün & Baycan, Gated Communities in Istanbul: the New Walls of the City, 87-109

⁶ How to obtain a contractors' number - Webpage Ministry of Environment and Urbanization <https://csb.gov.tr/sss/belgelendirme-hizmetleri> (in Tr.)

⁷ News Article – quotes from the Minister of Environment and Urbanization Murat Kurum – <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/bakan-kurum-turkiyede-450-bin-muteahhit-var-41027230>

⁸ Davis, City of Quartz, p.7

⁹ Davis, City of Quartz, p.12

¹⁰ Azem I., Ecumenopolis: City Without Limits [Documentary], min.8

¹¹ Cabannes Y., with Uzuncaysili Baysal C. and Arif Hasan (coll.), Forced Evictions of Istanbul

¹² Available for free on Youtube with English Subtitles,

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maEcPKBXVoM>

¹³ Agaoglu, "My World Europe". Ecumenapolis. Advertisement. Transcript. 2012.

¹⁴ Record Sales on Ayazma My World Europe Settlement, Milliyet Newspaper, 14.04.2013 <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/agaoglu-nun-ayazma-daki-3100-konutu-teslime-hazir-ekonomi-1693354/>

¹⁵ Uzuncaysili Baysal C., From Ayazma to Bezirganbahce: Aftermath of Relocation, pp.15-16

¹⁶ Sönmez, Interview, Ecumenapolis, [Transcript] 2012.

¹⁷ Haydarpaşa Station's 10 Year Long Struggle, News Article, 27.11.2014.

<http://bianet.org/biamag/toplum/160311-haydarpasa-gari-nin-10-yillik-mucadelesi>

¹⁸ Koc N, Manhattan Model for Haydarpasa, Sabah Newspaper, 10.06.2005

¹⁹ Aftermath of Haydarpaşa Fire, Milliyet Newspaper, 29.11.2010

<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/bu-yangina-kim-izin-verdi-magazin-1320110>

²⁰ Illegal Renovations at Haydarpasa, Milliyet Newspaper, 01.12.2010

<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-haydarpasa-tadilatinin-yasadisi-oldugu-anlasildi-gundem-1320969/>

Chapter Four

“Fortress / Hammer and the Rock”

Sunlight or a Light Bulb?

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Fig.28 : Istanbul, Esenyurt

“[...]The mega investments that foreign investors can't perform in their home countries -due to their democratic process- are all brought here. Imagine, can you build a hotel in Central Park in New York? No, it's not possible! Because people there know that this space is needed for the city to breathe. It is needed for rainwater to reach the soil, even if you don't go there yourself. But here, we think it is modern to build parking lots underneath parks. We lose all of the land's soil and think it's ecological architecture to plant trees on balconies. We build houses in the forest, we construct fake ponds with underground water. We remove all of the soil (to fill the land with concrete) and raise rabbits in 30 cm of soil, we call it natural life. Then we call gecekondu towns inhumane and demolish them and replace them with Faraday cages that are of concrete and not at all suitable for human life. It's incomprehensible. Even if this doesn't lead to a crisis, this city will eventually kill its residents.”¹

- Mücella Yapici

The comment above is a summary of the many aspects of the recent past and frankly, in my opinion, the future mentality of Turkish politicians in planning metropolitan cities. It is so astonishingly accurate that, even someone who has only visited Istanbul briefly could recognize the phenomenon captivating the city, specifically how little nature is regarded. It is of course no surprise that Ms.Yapici was able to analyse the situation so accurately, as she is an architect who dedicated her life to Istanbul, a member of the Chamber of Architects Istanbul Metropolitan Branch Urbanization, Disaster Committee and Environmental Impact Assessment Board as well as a fierce activist who still regularly gets into trouble for protesting and resisting in the front lines during Gezi Park Protests of Istanbul.

In order to tell the story of the Gezi Park Protests, it's appropriate to recall the Taksim first: Istanbul's and maybe Turkey's most famous public space full of character and history.

Taksim Square has been a public space for centuries; it goes back as far as the 18th century, to be exact. Many buildings forming this square have undergone major changes over the years and many more have been destroyed.

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Fig.29 & 30 : Taksim Square, Photographs taken by Henri Prost

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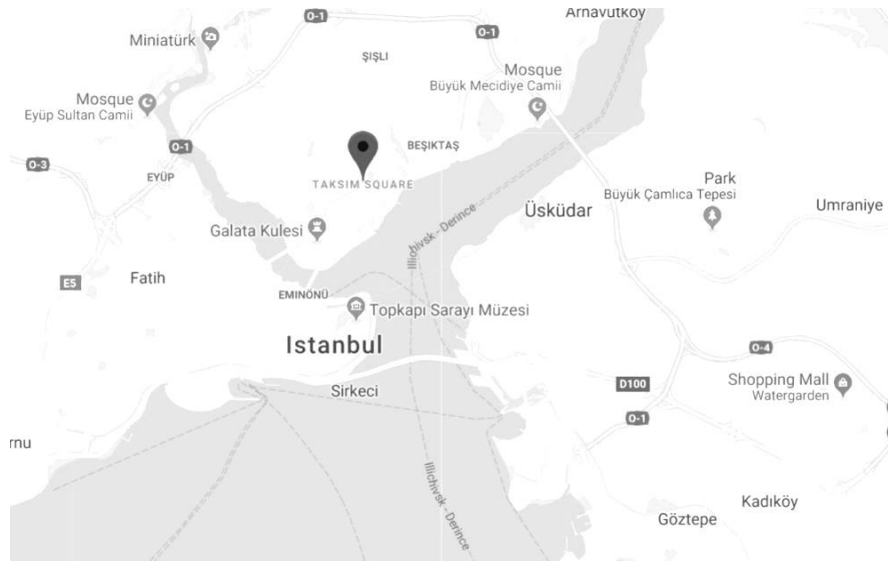


Fig.31 : Location of Taksim Square

The first building of the area which had a public use instead of private housing or shops, was a *maksem* which was made in 1732², which to some degree can be described as a water tank, used to distribute water which was brought to the city from the Belgrad Forests and dams of Istanbul. The water brought to the city would be held in a cistern before distributed with the *maksem*. The water volume of the Taksim cistern is 2730 cubic meters, remarkable for that day and age. During the Ottoman period, there were makeshift structures on the face of the cistern facing the square. There was even a simple shed theatre. Therefore it is safe to say, Taksim had been in the center of the city and a cultural hub even before it was turned into a planned public square. Later on, a store building was added on to the main cistern, where luxury carriages such as horse-drawn cars were sold. Over time, police stations and toilet buildings were built. In 1940, with a new understanding of urbanism (brought by Prost), all of these buildings were destroyed and the cistern re-appeared³.

Another landmark, the historical artillery barracks and the Gezi Park is a rather enormous area consisting of 38000 m² which is located in between two major streets of the Taksim. The field used to be an Armenian cemetery, which was then moved and the barracks were built in its place. The first section of the artillery barracks was made as early as the late 1790s', which was a wooden building of one floor, later destroyed by fire during a rebellion in 1806. The second section of the barracks was built by the Armenian architect Krikor Balyan and was influenced by Indian, Russian

and Turkish architecture. After the WWI, the building had been majorly destroyed. In 1940, the Governor and Mayor of Istanbul, Lütfü Kırdar, made radical changes in Taksim within the framework of the urban design project of the consultant architect Henri Prost. Taksim Barracks was therefore destroyed in 1947. The resulting area was associated with the square with the name of *Gezi of Taksim*. The area of 38000 m² was afterward the breathing area of Istanbul, much like Central Park is in New York. Henri Prost as an expert in urban planning prepared a large park project between Taksim, Dolmabahçe, Nişantaşı and Beşiktaş areas. He was also the one who suggested Gezi of Taksim idea to the authorities. Gezi Park was the first park in the early Republican period; with its marble staircases and seating areas overlooking the Bosphorus, benches and grass fields, all of which made Gezi a frequent place for people to come and visit.

“Protecting our environment is not a luxury we can choose to enjoy, but a simple matter of survival.”

- Dalai Lama

Taksim Square has not solely been a place where citizens came to relax or for entertainment but also to make their voices heard. After the founding of the republic and citizens gaining democratic rights, it has been a hotbed for demonstrations and public statements, for almost a century. Even back in the early `30s, there are photographs taken from a demonstration which called for better rights for women and children.

Yet, the celebration of May the 1st, Labour Day at Taksim Square was a matter of debate between governments and the masses for many years. In the first years of the republic, it was banned to celebrate Labour Day until the ban was lifted 50-years later in 1976. One year later in 1977, the celebration turned disastrous.

On May 1, 1977, about 500,000 people, mostly working class and left-wing supporters, attended the rally in Taksim Square to celebrate Labour Day. 34 people were killed and 130 people were injured during the mass panic and shootings. There has been contradicting rumours, that the government and extreme nationalist groups were behind the event or it was an inner spat between different left-wing groups; yet the result remains the same: planned chaos and lost lives. The date has been dubbed as the Bloody May the 1st since then and is remembered every year on Labour Day. It also marks the peak point of a three year period of civil unrest in the country, resulting in the military coup d'état of 1980.



Fig.32 : Nakiye Elgün, Turkey 's first female educator and (later became) one of the first female members of the Parliament, reading a public statement about Children 's Rights



Fig.33 : Labour Day celebrations, May the 1st 1977

Labour Day celebrations thus have been a taboo subject for Taksim Square, for a brief period of time between 2009 (when it was declared a national holiday) until 2012, citizens were able to gather and celebrate peacefully.

Albeit the events took place in the spring of 2013, now known as Gezi Park Protests, has changed the Square's destiny, forever.

The Beginning

The large public space which was foreseen in the plans of Henri Prost had already taken its first blow in 1955 (A.Menderes era) with the building of Istanbul Hilton Hotel. Followed by the construction of Hyatt Hotel, Intercontinental Hotel, Swiss Hotel and Ritz Carlton, Gezi Park and the Square has lost the impact as a great green area and the seating areas overlooking Bosphorus were rendered useless and replaced by the pleasant and tasteful(!) views of luxury hotels.

Just before the general elections in June 2011, Turkey's PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the upcoming plans for Taksim. Artillery Barracks will be rebuilt -where the Gezi Park is now located- and car traffic will be moved underground therefore the area would be pedestrian only. Right after, in September 2011, the city council (which is also controlled by the government) approved the project.

The Labour Day celebrations on 1st of May, 2012; a peaceful celebration, nevertheless hosted a great number of people. Up until that point, it had been ten years since the AKP government came to power and in the lead up to the event there was major discomfort among the people, so a gathering of masses was seen as a threat.

In June 2012, the Chamber of Turkish Engineers and Architects filed a lawsuit in order to cease the Taksim project yet in September of the same year, the construction began. A few months later a petition which was started by the people in order to stop the construction gained close to fifty-thousand signatures and shortly after in January 2013, the Board of Heritage Preservation found the project "*contradictory to public interest*" and rejected all implementations. Erdogan's reaction to that was "*We shall reject what was rejected.*" Following this statement, in February, the 70-year old pedestrian bridge which was designed by Henri Prost and connected Gezi Park and the northern main street was demolished, making the park less accessible by the people.



Fig.34 : Taksim Square and Gezi Park



Fig.35 : Taksim Square and Gezi Park

The Unfolding

Meanwhile, the High Council for the Preservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage swiftly approved the project.

A project that was prepared behind closed doors without any consultation with any institutions or public opinion was imposed on Taksim despite all the criticism.

Feeling threatened by the people who had started to voice their concerns, the government banned the Labour Day celebrations for the year of 2013 by claiming the road constructions in the periphery of Taksim Square as the reason⁴. In order to keep protesters from reaching the Square, public transportation such as inter-city ferry and subway lines were cancelled, Atatürk and Galata Bridges were closed to traffic and all the roads leading to Taksim were barricaded by the police. Three citizens were injured and seventy-two were taken into custody in the aftermath of the clash between police and the protestors⁵.

“Now what is left for us to do, is to understand the real value of our living spaces and try to protect them.”⁶

- Mücella Yapici

On May 27th at midnight, excavators entered Gezi Park from the side of the previously destroyed pedestrian bridge and started tearing down trees. The following day, a group of five hundred volunteers who belonged to the Taksim Solidarity Organisation pitched tents and stayed in the park 24/7, as a precaution against the machines to return and destroy rest of the park.

Taking turns while staying on guard just to save some trees from being relocated might somewhat seem like an overreaction to some. However, according to the government, the trees were not being cut down but were, in fact, only being relocated in order to fit the new Taksim plans. Even if that were true, everyone in their right minds would see that it is highly unlikely for century year old trees to survive a relocation.

So what were these people standing up against?

What exactly is the Taksim Square Pedestrianization Project?

Pedestrianization of any public square is almost never a bad idea. Yet, the ways that are utilized to accomplish these can be another issue altogether. When the Taksim Project was proposed to the city council, members of the opposition party⁷ agreed to its implementation on one condition –the traffic should stay on the streets and be redirected instead of being moved underground. The reasoning behind this was nothing more than the intention to keep Taksim as a Square, where people would gather and use their constitutional rights to protest and/or celebrate. If the streets that lead up to Taksim were to be dug up, then it would have been akin to the proclamation of a death sentence for Taksim Square as a communal gathering area.

Moreover, there are other ways to move car traffic underground, as recently proposed by Elon Musk after a “nerve-wracking” car ride in LA⁸ traffic. But, of course, that would require conducting a thorough analysis and research into the dynamics, which most definitely would also take a long time. This is something governments don’t like to waste if they could just go ahead and start with the project they said they would complete before the elections.

The second problem with the project is that it actually is not a single project with clear lines but in fact two different designs that would be introduced to the area together and have separate repercussions. Therefore, the rebuilding of the Artillery Barracks—which, in fact, is the more problematic aspect of this ordeal—is what ignited the fire, quite literally.

Rebuilding a historical building is almost always a bad idea. Regardless of how well the design stays true to the original building or how sustainable the construction ensues, it is still rather meaningless to rebuild a historical building which no longer serves the purpose of its *being*, on the same location which has no place in the new and contemporary city. Even if we were to agree to the reconstruction because of maybe reintroducing cultural and historical values, we still can’t defend it if the building will be used for an altogether different purpose: which exactly is the case in the rebuilding of artillery barracks in Taksim. Since the an artillery in the city center no longer has any use, the new functions for the building would include a shopping mall, a mosque and an opera house and let’s not forget a courtyard with a handful of “protected trees”.

For many, that was the deal breaker. Gezi Park, protected as a SIT area, in its –then- state was a completely free green public park where everyone could enter and stay as long as they wish yet in the “updated and beautified” version, the park would stay hidden in the courtyard of the new building complex and therefore would be less accessible, as well as smaller in size.

CITY OF GOLD



Fig. 36 : Gezi Park, Taksim, Before the Interventions



Fig.37 : Rendering of the reconstruction of Artillery Barracks in Taksim

Coming back to the Gezi Protests, from that point on the initial volunteers had their tents lit on fire and faced extreme violence from the police, protests therefore escalated.

People who were gathering in the area were white-collar finance and service sector employees. Protests would typically start after 7p.m. as these people were protesting by night and working the next day. The fire ignited in Istanbul's Taksim by an urban design project spread all over the country. In the end, it became a collective uprising which questioned wider structures: the policies adopted in the framework of neoliberal capitalism, authoritarian rule, and a conservative/religious society. People demanded equal rights, freedom of their lifestyles and participation in the decision-making process.⁹ The Gezi movement was resistance to, or against the system.

After the first couple of days of intense clashes between police forces and the protestors, instead of compromising and communicating about the problems, government officials kept throwing fuel on the fire. PM Erdogan has stated

*“Whatever you do, we have decided. It will be done.”*¹⁰

Protests lasted 112 days, until the first week of September. 80 cities in Turkey held these protests, approximately 4 million people attended. 4329 civilians and 672 policemen were injured. 6 civilians lost their lives. 5513 people were taken into custody.

A demographic analysis has shown, that 47,3% were between the ages of 18 and 25, 31,2 % were between 25-35, 10,8% between 31-35 and 16,1% above 36 years old.¹¹

These numbers clearly show that it was mostly the youth of Turkey, who were worried about their future and raised their voices. It was the most diverse and strange protest in Turkey, people who would under no circumstance would be seen collaborating walked together; people with a raised fist or a wolf symbol¹² in the air, fans of rival football clubs, women wearing Islamic turban and members of the LGBTQ community with rainbow flags, all side by side.

So where does the academia stand in all this discussion? Are architects completely powerless against the lawmakers, politicians, contractors and real-estate moguls? In such a hostile environment, can architects and urban planners actually be free to create, taking the needs of the public into full consideration?

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Fig.38 : Woman in Red, Gezi Protests



Fig.39 : Taksim Square, Gezi Protests

After the -alleged- coup attempt in 15th of June, 2016, the government declared a state of emergency, in theory, to fight with terrorism; the government is able to pass laws without the need of a majority vote. (The Law will be referred to in short KHK's¹³) Yet, it is fairly easy to abuse such great power.

Let's hear it once more from Ms.Mücella Yapici :

“The more you struggle, the conditions you will fight gets even worse. For example, there is no possibility of fighting with the help of law (lawsuits etc.); because the law has changed. In other words, we are going through an extremely dire and unfavourable environment in terms of city planning and urban ecology. If we see the latest KHK's, there is a rise in violations of rights and layoffs all in the name of fighting with terrorism, yet a vast majority of the laws are about environmental issues in Turkey. The latest KHK, for example, has reduced all the social spaces (including roads, green areas, schools, health and religious institutions) in the cities by half. It's all done with the name of the law.”¹⁴

The Ending

It has been six years since the Gezi Protests (as of 2019).

Meanwhile, the Pedestrianization of Taksim project is finished. The Court which decided on 31 May 2013 to stop the execution on grounds that *irreparable damages would occur*, has approved the same project on 21st of February, 2014.

In following years, Taksim Square and Istiklal Street flooded multiple times after heavy rains, yet nature can't be blamed for the damage. As stated earlier, these projects and the mentality of disregard to nature's and people's demands have turned Istanbul into an impermeable surface. Rainfall can hardly meet the soil; it either flows directly or forms a pond on asphalt or concrete surfaces.

On 17th of February, 2017, the construction of Taksim Mosque started and as of February 2019, it is safe to say it will be finished within a year.

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Fig.40 : Taksim Square, aftermath of the Pedestrianization Project



Fig.41 : Taksim Mosque, in construction

Coming back to the reconstruction of the artillery barracks; there are multiple lawsuits in court –as of February 2019-, therefore the issue is not settled yet. However, President Erdogan gives statements on almost every occasion about the project ensuring the designs are being made and it will be built¹⁵.

The “Gezi Spirit” still lives on in the hearts of many, yet even more has lost the will to fight. According to the latest reports by the Turkish Institute of Statistics¹⁵, in the following year of the 15th June Events, the number of people who have emigrated abroad has risen to 42%. The institute hasn’t published any recent reports but my guess is that the numbers have continued to rise in 2018 and probably will rise in the upcoming years.

As it is an unpleasant way to end this story, I believe we must stay true to reality. Turkey finds itself in a dire situation; even though governments come and go and people who govern are not immortals. Nonetheless, the damages done in the past years will soon pass the point of no return: as a tree takes years to grow yet minutes to cut down, mindlessly destroying the country’s natural resources will no doubt, jeopardize the life of future generations. Even though there were a few rays of sunlight seen in the recent past, it seems that Turkey is lit with a light bulb, at least for now.

NOTES

General Remarks: A light bulb is the logo of Turkey's governing party, AKP (Justice and Development Party)

¹ Yapici, Interview, Ecumenopolis, [Transcript] min.30

² **Maksem** : In the Ottoman period, the water coming from the dams or the forest land, had to be collected in some sort of water tanks, in order to be distributed to the houses, fountains and baths. A maksem has an eight-pointed, limestone body and a pyramidal, eight-sided roof.

³ Gül & Dee & Cünük, Istanbul's Taksim Square and Gezi Park, pp.63-72

⁴ 1st of May: Celebrations won't be allowed, BBC, 25.04.2013

https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/04/130425_1mayis_taksim

⁵ 1st of May: Police clash with those who want to reach Taksim Square, BBC, 01.05.2013,

https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/05/130501_1mayis_update

⁶ Yapici, Interview, Ecumenopolis, [Transcript] min.86.

⁷ Main opposition Party in AKP Governments since 2002, CHP – Cumhuriyetçi Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

⁸ **The LOOP System** : “Loop is a zero-emissions, high-speed underground public transportation system in which passengers are transported on autonomous electric skates travelling at 125-150 miles per hour. Electric skates will carry between 8 and 16 passengers.” – The Boring Company <https://www.boringcompany.com/dugout>

⁹ Demands of the Taksim Platform, BBC, 05.06.2013,

https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/06/130605_taksim_platformu_talepler

¹⁰ Speech of PM Erdogan in the Foundation Ceremony for the 3rd Bridge, Milliyet Newspaper, 29.05.2013, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakandan-sure-pazarligi-23390554>

¹¹ Gezi : The Report, KONDA Research and Consultancy Agency, 2014

http://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/KONDA_GeziRaporu2014.pdf

¹² Left or right raised fist is internationally a sign of solidarity and support majorly used by working class and left wing supporters. A wolf symbol as a hand gesture typically sign of a far-right/nationalist party supporter.

¹³ **KHK** : short for Kanun Hükmünde Kararname, enables Turkish government to rule “by decree without control mechanisms” during state emergency.

¹⁴ Yapici, Interview by Cansu Piskin, published on

<https://www.evrensel.net/haber/321736/mucella-yapici-gezi-umuttu>

¹⁵ Statements of Erdogan about the Military Barracks, Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 25.01. 2019

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¹⁶ Annual Immigration Report, Turkish Institute of Statistics,

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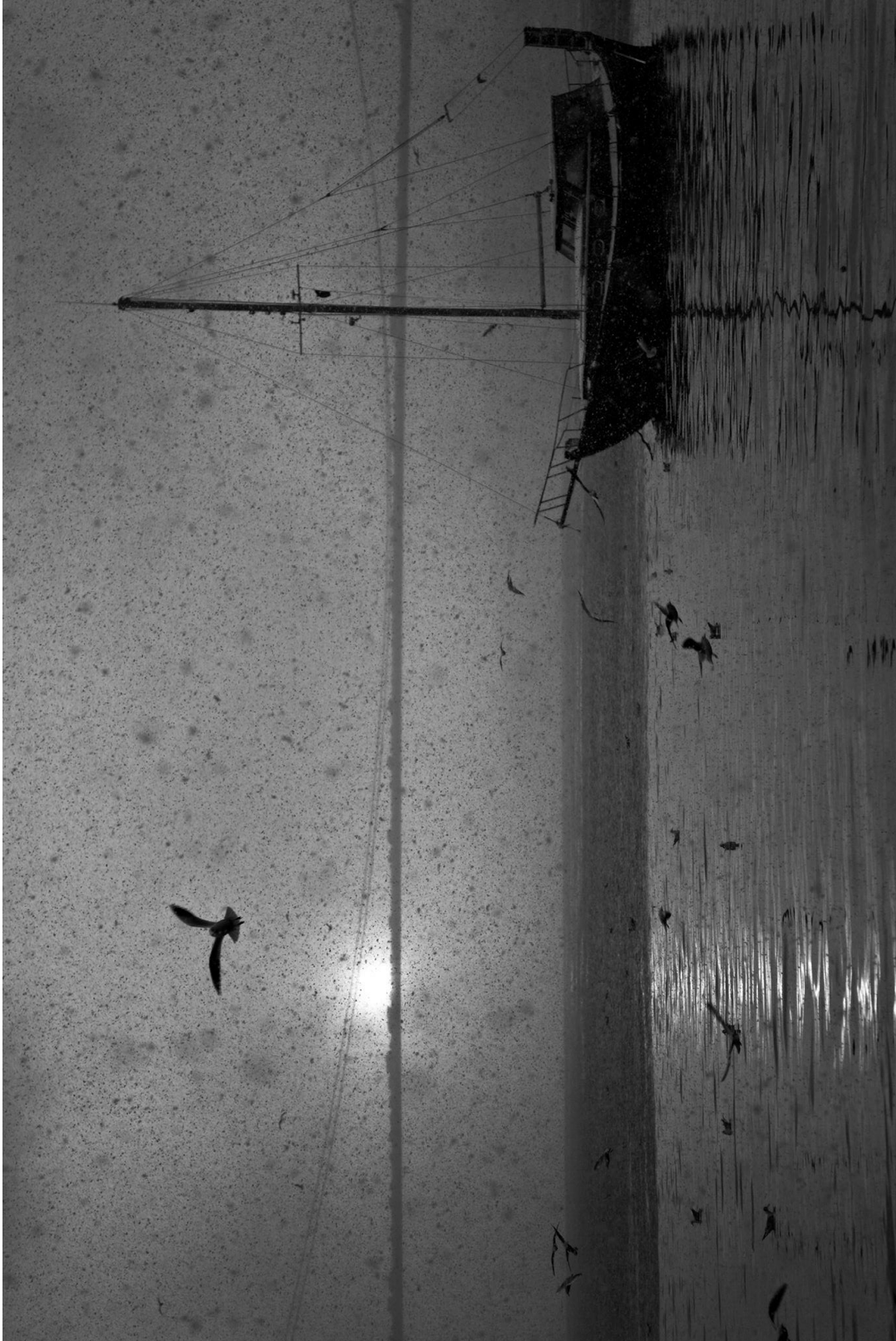


Fig.42 : Istanbul, 2019

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