ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION AND THE CITY AMID CHANGE

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Introduction

Most recently, while in some countries financial crises and global economic recession caused an average unemployment rate of 25% for architects and an overall significant reduction of the activities in the construction sector, Turkey and especially the city of Istanbul have not experienced such negative effects of the crises thanks to the new investments and large-scale urban development. However, reflecting an anonymous fragmentary character, recent implementations - disintegrated new housing blocks and shopping centers, urban regeneration projects and growing transportation network through the city and out of the city – and improper restorations and additions cast a shadow on the historical identity of the city. Architecture, itself, eventually, has become an undesirable practice due to its non-contextualized self-focused beauty, and ignorant and destructive attitude.

Within such a dramatically transforming urban space, architecture education environment experiences certain far-reaching consequences of the local and global changes in architecture and architecture education. It is a very well-known fact that architecture & design education and the city, as a close extension of learning environment, by their very nature, co-exist, inextricably linked and strongly influence each other. How are the key components of an education environment – context, instructors, students, content and learning – affected by the turbulence of dynamic relationships in such a vibrant atmosphere, while struggling with the rapid pace of the change of dynamics of education and education technologies and environment in a globalized world? What are the means to bridge the gap between these two areas both in design education and design practice?

The basic aims of this study are to present objective and subjective findings about the case and their assessment reflecting various points of views of living actors of architecture and urban environment of the city such as education professionals, architects, students, engineers and some other urban dwellers, and to give the audience insights into the changing meaning of the place with its all transforming and interweaving layers.

This study consists of quantitative and spatial data on architecture and design schools in İstanbul, ongoing activities, projects and implementations, and potential of the urban environment for architecture and design education in order to provide a global perspective. In other words, this paper offers a presentation on the transformation of the city, emerging architectural activities and the panorama of the schools of architecture and their interactions in İstanbul.

From the Capital of Empires to Megapolis: İstanbul amid Change

Since the establishment of the city till the 60s İstanbul has developed particularly in 5 major sections (Fig. 1). (1) The historical peninsula: capital and governmental center of the Byzantium and Ottoman Empires, including multiple monuments such as the Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Suleymaniye Mosque and Topkapı Palace; (2) the Galata district: essentially a Genoese settlement which has developed during the Westernization process of the city. This old financial, trade and recreation center, which used to be the extension of the İstanbul port, included movie theaters, dining facilities, cultural centers and consulates. The most dominant building of the area is the Galata Tower; (3) the Golden Horn district: housing industrial buildings until recently and cosmopolitan small-scale settlements along its shores; (4) the Anatolian part: including Kadıköy (Chalcedon) and Üsküdar (Skutari) settlements; (5) the Bosphorus villages: housing mostly minorities during the Ottoman Empire, and aristocrats during the 17th and 18th centuries, with limited transportation facilities. The Westernization and globalization efforts beginning from the 19th century can be seen in the high-quality neo-classical, art-nouveau, and modernist buildings of the city and its recreational life.

Staring from the 50s, as the internal immigration has doubled the population to almost a million, and as new districts have been added to the outskirts, the city, which houses mostly illegal buildings that are generally served by the municipality in terms of infrastructure, has reached an incomprehensive size. Moreover, due to the destructive zoning processes and public works of negative additions/subtractions, urban fabric, exposed to high traffic and pedestrian densities, has gone under major transformations leading to substantial decrease in its value.

The most significant urbanization processes within the city have been the buildings and roads enacted in the 30s based on the Proust plan; opening of boulevards and shoreline roads, the increasing of the road-network due to the increase in motorized transportation demand since the 50s. These changes have transformed İstanbul into a city that is governed from the center, a city no longer manageable.

The rupture between the city’s cultural past (representing its symbolic values and accumulation) and its social domain began in the 50s with the heavy destructions and interventions in the historical urban fabric initiated by the time’s Prime Minister Menderes. The historical peninsula has experienced a dramatic transformation through the demolishing of over 7000 buildings and some part of the historic city walls along with the opening up of the shoreline and 2 grand boulevards, Vatan and Millet Avenues (Fig. 2). After these years, though İstanbul has experienced multiple re-planning efforts, it became a city with no comprehensive strategic master plan in the midst of a planning-development/growth conflict.
The unchanging locations of the governmental, educational and recreational centers and the addition of new patterns during this growth have accelerated the deterioration of the historical peninsula.

The courthouse, university complexes, hotels and other buildings were built with no consideration of the archeological structures and their identities.

Till the 60s immigrants were enforced for assimilation, yet after the 60s İstanbul became an environment of no-identity where immigrants of the countryside started to interpret the city based on their experiences and backgrounds. The phrase ‘There is no other İstanbul’, which invites residents to courtesy, good manners and decency, is now vanished. Historian Doğan Kuban states the dominancy of the provincial classes on the city as: “In the urban vision of a new İstanbul citizen of rural background ‘history’ has meaning only as a simple accessory. It can be used for ideological purposes but its cultural content is limited. The behavior that eradicates relentlessly the historical identity of the Turkish cities within the last half a century is the result of this cultural abyss. Those who claim of basing their politics on the traditional have not respected even a stone of the traditional environment”2.

The internal immigration stating from the 50s and 60s have resulted in the proliferation of the illegal “gecekondu”s (shanty dwellings) and the spreading of the 5-6 storey low-profile apartments throughout the city in the 70s. The “background” and “foreground” characteristics of the city and its buildings3, described by Le Corbusier as “poetic”, have deteriorated, and this duality has been completely wiped off around the 2000s, turning the city into an anonymous urban silhouette similar to that of Hongkong. Meanwhile, an excessive number of controversial projects and construction of new high-rise buildings including but not limited to 5-star hotels erected in historical palaces’ gardens, construction of disintegrated urban blocks, erecting sealed-off mass-housing, the loss of natural contours of the shorelines due to massive coastal fillings, and changes in the rural character of the Bosphorus villages have been realized. İstanbul has now become a chaotic space, which has been invaded with ordinary buildings, motor vehicles and speculators at the turn of the millennium. Built in 1955, the Hilton Hotel, seemingly the modernist building in the city, which had been criticized at the time for damaging the silhouette of İstanbul (Fig. 3), is now seen as an innocent venture when compared with the nearby skyscrapers, which were erected after the 90s and were litigated by the Chamber of Architects.

The liberal politics undertaken at the beginning of the mid-80s paved the way for new investments. Small – and medium-scale centennial industrial buildings along the Golden Horn were demolished to create empty and under-used parks. In fact, traditional urban fabric of İstanbul was never in the form of grandeur squares of the west with extensive axes leading up to large buildings dominating these voids. The destructions of Tarlabası- an old residential area in Pera district – and the opening of new boulevards have led to loss of historic urban fabric and

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3 Kortan, Enis. Turkish Architecture and urbanism through the eyes of Le Corbusier. İstanbul: Boyut Yayncılık. 2005.
social changes as well. The loss of natural shoreline forms through the extension of roads on piles, the building of 1st and 2nd bridges on the Bosphorus in 1973 and 90s respectively have results in the expansion of the city along east-west axis parallel to the shoreline. Contrarily, with the opening up of new arterials based on the zoning decisions undertaken after 2010, as seen in some cities globally in 1960ies, consequent upon deliberate urban decisions, İstanbul has started growing towards north into the formerly agricultural and forested land that houses city’s water basins and forests (Fig. 4). Besides 2 bridges on the Bosphorus, the 3rd bridge, whose construction has already started, along with the new mega-airport project can be considered as a sign of new transformations and development.

Sustainable urban planning allows synergy to be developed between different functions, for example, business, research facilities and higher education establishments on a single site4. Besides its negative environmental influences, fast growing urban sprawl has brought about gross inefficiencies and disintegration from public transportation to the improper cultural and physical patterns added to the city.

The second oldest metro of the world was built in the Galata district in 1875. Later İstanbul had to wait over a century for the building of new lines. Lightrail metro, operating partially underground, was built in the 90s, but metro construction has basically speeded up since 2010. The reconfiguration of the city’s transportation network after 2000, the operating of the new BLT system (Metrobüs) and new metro lines, the construction of undersea rail tunnel called “Marmaray” connecting the two continents have all accelerated the speed of transportation; however, the growth in population as well as the increase in car ownership and the insufficiency of the public transportation network have altogether turned İstanbul to a city faced with traffic congestion throughout the day. While the sea transportation along the Bosphorus, which lasts for about 15-20 minutes between the continents, includes also a recreational function, this was reduced to 90 seconds by filling up city’s squares with metro stations, sacrificing the cultural-archeological remnants of the city. The process of moving between an origin and a destination, which provides the rider with special experiences, has turned to a mundane “transportation” activity, disregarding the spatial, symbolical and humane values of centuries.

Current Architectural Activities in the City

Istanbul, as Turkey’s largest city and commercial capital, has for decades been the destination of a continuous national migration process. Istanbul’s annual urbanization rates since 1950 have persistently exceeded 3 per cent, with a peak of 5.12 per cent annually during the 1970-1975 period, making Istanbul Europe’s most rapidly growing city… The rapid urban growth of Istanbul is mostly spontaneous, without significant control by local or regional authorities, while there is also no serious metropolitan development plan…\(^5\)

At present İstanbul continues to grow in tandem with contemporary dynamics, such as neoliberal policies, global capital and privatization of public spaces, similar to other metropolises that rapidly grow and transform. During this process there has been an extensive increase in the number of almost all building types in the city. Private museums, cultural centers and foundation/private schools – both elementary-secondary-high schools and universities – have increased rapidly. At the same time İstanbul has enjoyed the establishment of its Modern Museum of Art. Yet, it is hard to claim that increased number of events, such as concerts and festivals, have contributed to the embodiment and flourishing of high quality arts and contemporary culture.

After the 2000s the city witnessed an explosion in the numbers of housing, in particular mass housing and skyscrapers. During that period, city’s new business districts were developed in Levent district between the junctions of 1st and 2nd Bosphorus Bridges. After the earthquake of 1999 and the crisis of 2001, TOKI (Mass Housing Institute), which was re-established to provide housing for low-income population, was directly appointed to the office of the Prime Minister, which resulted in its exemption from local inspections. Hence, the Institute was equipped with extensive authority including the changing of zoning ordinances and expropriations. This paved the way for the erection of numerous expensive skyscrapers and urban transformation. The concept of an urban fabric, which housed individual and fragmented residential buildings with gigantic malls scattered in-between instead of mixed-use boulevards and promenades, was encouraged. TOKI has built more than 500,000 residential buildings between 2001 and 2002. In spite of its initial assertion that its primary aim was to provide housing for low-income population, 30% of residences were geared towards affluent customers while the rest of the building stock were designed for middle-income population.

Along with the nomination of Istanbul for the 2020 Olympic games, the mega-projects planned for the city, such as the new mega-airport and the “crazy project”, as announced by the Prime Minister, of cloning the Bosphorus to create a second Bosphorus between the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea, can be considered as the precursors of the disintegration of the urban fabric through a decision-making process dominated by the political framework, rather than a shared decision-making. The historic identity of the city is no longer considered a reference, but a generic background that can be bent randomly to create all types of organizations.

With the resources created, in particular the privatization of sectors, a “cleaning” operation was taken up within the city that led the way to the “beautification” of each district. Large complexes, particularly mosques, were restored recklessly. In the end, a “synthetic” environment dominated by real estate, images and prestige, and lacking any architecture and spatial quality. Istanbul, for which many songs and poems have been written in the past, no longer has such charming spaces and people.

With the urban regeneration legislation issued in 2012, certain parts of the city were demolished entirely and began to be re-built within a new approach. Much of the city’s reality related to its development was erased; new and fragmented patterns were added instead. In this period of legal buildings without any place attachment, the illegal “gecekondu” (shanty dwellings), with its small-scale fabric embedded in its green context, can be considered as a relatively innocent and integrated structure (Fig. 5).

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Architecture Education and Development of Schools in İstanbul

At the 16th ENHSA Conference, Michael Monti, executive director of Association of Collegiates School of Architecture in Washington, stated that the total student enrolment in professional degree programs in the United States is 8% down from 2008 to 2012, and four-year Bachelor of Architecture programmes saw a 53% drop in applications. The situation in Turkey, on the other hand, is just the opposite. Although the unemployment rate among architects is extremely high, as provided by TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute), and low wages with long working hours, architecture is still one of the most preferred professions along with Law and Medicine. Consequently, there is an enormous increase in the number of schools of architecture and design, and the student enrollments, which is a significant paradox (Fig. 6).

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Historical Development of Architecture Schools of İstanbul

Three Universities having Architecture Schools in Istanbul, which were founded in the first half of the 21st century, led to other architecture schools in Turkey. Following the beaux-art tradition, Sanayi-i NefiseMektebi (Fine Arts School) in İstanbul, which was established at the end of the 19th century, is the first formal school of architecture in Turkey, whose name changed as Academy of Fine Arts in 1927, and finally as Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar University. Another school, where architecture was taught, was the Engineering School, named İstanbul Technical University after 1955. While the education in Fine Arts School was based on art, that of Engineering School was scientific and technical. In 1942, another institution, the Technical School, named as Yıldız Technical University in 1980, established an Architecture Program.

Till the mid 90s, there were only six state universities with architecture programs in Turkey, and three of them were located in Istanbul. With the establishment of foundation universities after this date this number started to increase. In 1999 three more foundation universities with architecture programs were founded. In 2005 the schools of architecture in Turkey were 36 in total, 9 of them in Istanbul. Their numbers increased to 44 in 2009, and more dramatically to 83 in 2013. In 2005 while the number of students was approximately 1937, in 2013 there has been an upsurge in enrolments in architecture schools with 5631 students.

Fig. 6. Data on student enrollments, total number of students and graduates of architecture schools in Turkey between 2002 and 2013

Source: Akyüz Levi et. al. 2015.
Schools of architecture in İstanbul make up 70% of the entire schools of architecture in Turkey⁹.

**Transformations in Architecture Education**

The rapid change in architecture media, tools, mobility, networking, new ways of design thinking (integrated, sustainable, system-based approaches, etc.), and continuous advances in technologies used (cloud-based technologies, new hardware-software and mapping opportunities, etc.) at an unprecedented pace creates another dazzling atmosphere in education and practice. Ted Landsmark, from Boston Architectural College, emphasised this reality in his lecture, in 16th ENHSA conference Dealing with Change: “The pace of change will never be this slow again... We need to figure out how to adapt to the exposure to absorption of, and reflection upon new data much more rapidly than we have been doing up to now. We are still too often followers of our students and clients in utilizing new data and data management resources now available to designers, educators, and planners...”¹⁰

Due to negative transformations of all cities in Turkey, as a natural reaction, the urban context has become major concern almost in all studios and courses. In order to develop architecture students’ awareness and responsibility towards their natural and urban environment, integrating basic sustainable design principles, inclusion of urban into the curriculum widely may not be sufficient. In order to create an effective learning environment there should be a strong alignment between practice and theory.

It is a fact that learning environment is not restricted with the school. The main components of learning, students-professors and course content interact with each other in certain context, that is the environment in its widest sense. Research on environmental psychology or environment-behaviour studies, putting emphasis on the significant role of effect of environment on people and interactions between two, is not new¹¹. This effect and interaction has become stronger for people preoccupied with the architecture and urban issues.

Rapoport asserts that the contexts or circumstances play an important role in the effects environment have on people¹². Dynamic juxtaposition of the sprawled city’s extremely disruptive physical-cultural-social/demographical radical patterns of change and growth, as a consequence of current neo-liberal policies, and aforementioned changes in architecture education and practice, increasing number of schools and architecture graduates, who unfortunately entitles to licence

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¹⁰ Monti, M. op. cit.


upon obtaining their diploma in Turkey, technological advances in every field, and other global, political and economic effects creates a dazzling atmosphere and a challenging medium. Such kind of drastic change does not allow for effective alignment and “creative adaptation”, which occurs in slower change.13

**Architecture Education and the City**

Questionnaires with open-ended questions were conducted with architecture students as well as academicians and experts from other disciplines to understand the perceived image of the city and to identify the extent to which urban transformation affects architectural education. When architecture students were asked about the first thing that comes to mind with regard to the word “İstanbul”, the majority of replies focused on the city’s historical identity and environmental problems. The findings of questionnaires demonstrated that architecture students were not informed of specific urban regeneration projects and applications except for the general information. 70% of architecture students objected to the undersea rail tunnel under the Bosphorus (Marmaray), which is considered by experts as having negative impacts on cultural heritage. While they considered the amount of urban issues undertaken in the program curriculum as satisfactory, they pointed out the insufficiency of public transportation network and poor quality of cultural events as the key reasons for their inadequate degree of attendance to cultural activities in the city.

It is generally believed that crowded metropolises such as Istanbul affect the learning environment of architectural education positively. However, the findings from the questionnaires indicated that students were not able to exploit Istanbul as a learning tool or as an extension of their learning environment due to the current chaotic structure of the city and its transportation problems. The role of a non-inclusive development approach based on “doing”, rather than widely discussion and participation, plays a crucial role in this lack of learning process from the urban space. Most academicians complain about their suffering from explaining legitimate concepts among various unsuitable architectural and urban decisions and ongoing destructive implementations in the city.

“A sustainable city should allow as many voices as possible to be heard and as many values as possible to be represented...Citizens who are proud of the cities in which they live are a precious resource for any city”14. On the contrary, the findings of interviews with İstanbulians of multiple professions show that: the Istanbulians barely get to know the new projects within the city through the real estate advertisements in the news and the ongoing construction projects around them. The increased number of books and publications on Istanbul reflect on the missing values of the city in a nostalgic manner. Prof. Reha Günay, one of the authors of these books, who shares with the views of many intellectuals, argues that Istanbul suffers from uncontrollable densities.15

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13 ibidem.
15 From the interview with Prof. Reha Günay.
Epilogue

It seems essential that, there should be strong alignment with the context and the components of learning environment, supporting each other consistently. The city is transforming constantly in a rapid pace. Meanwhile, in global context the dynamics of architecture education with all its components have undergone transformation dramatically. Changing of students’ demands and their profiles, education technologies, learning materials and tools as well as the increase in mobility all create a dynamic environment that is hard to manage. This learning environment, lacking in mutual support of its elements (both in theory and practice), fails to create physical, cultural and economic sustainability.

“As material object,…the building should communicate to the human-as-embodied, to the body that learns about the physical world, and itself, through direct sensory experience of that world. If there is no ‘higher’ order, there is still, and always will be, this ontological one on which to ground architectural design”\textsuperscript{16}. A city can be seen as “a seat of learning and a place for the meeting of minds”\textsuperscript{17}. Containing many patterns, the streets and the buildings of the city, bringing people from different backgrounds, naturally, dwells various sensorial experiences, and major lessons about the issues of urban design or architecture. Architecture without any interaction with its context, however aesthetic it may be, turns into an unwelcome and non-didactic object.


\textsuperscript{17} Cliff Moughtin With Peter Shirley. Urban Design, Green Dimension, Architectural, 2005, p. 95.