The City of Contrasts/Contradiction:

An Examination of the Contemporary Metamorphosis in Istanbul, a Socio-Cultural and Spatial Perspective

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Walking through Istanbul, one may feel as if browsing casually the pages of a history book. Historical elements, along with the contemporary urban patterns, conceal countless surprises in the streets, neighborhoods, and alleys of the city. The recent changes, however, require keener eyes to recognize these values. What is happening today is the turbulent alteration in every aspect of the city life from urban formations to social attitudes, which has been the upshot of the ongoing globalization process.

Over the course of its history, Istanbul, has always displayed a certain extent of duality, contrasts and fragmented qualities (Bilgin and Karaoren 1993; Celik 1986; Keyder 1999; Oncu 1999). The level of dichotomy and heterogeneity within the social, cultural, and urban fabric of the city reached its apex during the second half of the twentieth century. It was in the 1950s that Istanbul started to lose its previous charisma to the complex effects of political and economic forces such as mass immigration, overpopulation, rapid urbanization and industrialization. The 1980s brought another striking metamorphosis to the city as it was transformed to a global city—adding a new layer to the city's evolving identity.

Through the city's constant change, the socio-cultural fabric of the society went from the polarities of *alaturka* and *alafranga* (Ottoman Turkish and European frankish) to *other* and *Istanbulite* (Kandiyoti 1997, 117; Oncu 1999, 96). Today, this new polarity comprises a diverse spectrum of socio-cultural genres such as arabesque, *gecekondu* (squatter house), midde-class and yuppie cultures. The city's urban identity has also been transformed from the traditional-westernized distinction to broader categorizations such as traditional-modern, cosmopolite-provincial, legal-illegal, local-global and planned-unplanned. Consequently, as Kuban reflects (1998, 254) the physical aspect of contemporary Istanbul simultaneously displays "village structures, traditional city structures and contemporary city structures." Moreover, as Oncu argues the communities of these structures "co-exist in the city often separated from one another as the hard-edged pieces of a mosaic" (1999, 95) and dwell in the city being aware of each other, but without understanding (Kuban 1998, 254). In short, everybody lives, molds, feels and dreams Istanbul differently. Hence, it may be possible, however, quite challenging to talk about certain nature of perception for the city's contemporary urban identity. Perhaps, in this indefinite and complex state, we may most easily track the urban qualities of the city in public spaces or in other words as Diane Ghirardo (1996, 43) states in "social spaces" such as piazzas, shopping areas, avenues, streets and gathering places, namely cafés, restaurants and likewise.

The intent of this study is to provide a contemporary portrayal of Istanbul, focusing on the globalization process and the various metamorphoses that have occurred in the spatial and socio-cultural context of the city since 1980. The social spaces of three districts in the city, Macka, Ortakoy, and Kadikoy were selected for special emphasis because of the typical paradigms of contemporary change reflected in each. By examining the past and present characteristics of the city, her people, and the specific districts of Macka, Ortakoy, and Kadikoy a conceptual model was developed to help predict the city's future spatial and socio-cultural relationships and patterns.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Today, over eleven million people sharing Istanbul perhaps have only one common thing in common, Istanbul itself. Having different cultural, economic and social background, however, they all participate to the current formation of the city. As such, it is not hard to imagine the city as having many different levels and facets of transformations. From a socio-cultural perspective, Istanbul's urban developments are heterogeneous formations that contain significant dichotomies such as traditional-modern, cosmopolitan-provincial, and local-global. As reflected in Kuban's words (1998:249) "Istanbul is a city whose physical dimensions change rapidly, social structure is hard to define holistically, and culture is not only dual but multi-dimensional that is spawned by hardly defined dynamic human agglomeration."

Any research study that attempts to examine the recent socio-cultural and spatial developments of such a complex city as Istanbul is presented with considerable challenges. Foremost among these challenges is the determination of an appropriate means by which to study the city in order to provide a contemporary portrayal. The process chosen for this research study was to narrow the focus to include only representative areas of the city that reflected urban paradigms of the globalization process, rather than attempting to examine the socio-cultural dynamics of the entire city.

Once the focus of the research was narrowed to include only representative areas, specific structures were identified that clearly exemplified discernible socio-cultural and architectural transformations. These structures and their transformations were examined within the urban context of their location and the community in which they were situated. Parameters that were generic to all the designated structures were set. These included the examination of publicly used places such as

cafe-bars, restaurants, tea houses and small scale retail stores where people's behavior and interaction with the structures reflected their cultural, social, and economic attitudes and status. Three districts Macka, Ortakoy, and Kadikoy were chosen for special emphasis because each had recently undergone significant transformations that could be attributed to accelerating international interactions; i.e., globalization and the rapid flow of information.

RATIONALE OF THE CHANGE

Change in societies, and correspondingly in cities, is not an unprecedented issue with which we are unfamiliar. Since change is an indispensable fact of life, "It would be absurd to talk as if we all expect societies normally to remain unchanged, so that change is exceptional and needs explaining," as Paul Stirling (1999: 26) reflects.

From the beginning of history, there has been a constant blossoming of multifaceted facts that remold and transform existent cultural conditions. Alvin Toffler (1980), the author of The Third Wave, thinks that waves are major changes in civilization. According to Toffler the first wave arrived with the development of agriculture and the second with industry. Today we are under the influence of the third, which is based on information. In fact, marked by the terms "information age" and "globalization," the last two decades have brought such a drastic change that cultural boundaries between nations have diminished creating almost identical societies.

Ironically, even though the imposed stereotypes of the global world seem to assimilate societies, cultural idiosyncrasies manifest themselves in small details through the socio-cultural activity patterns and the architectural exercise of urban life. In Istanbul, the unusual practice of placing security gates at the entrances of shopping malls where each visitor/shopper is investigated by a security person illustrates how global models are modified because of socio-cultural imperatives or, simply, because of the choices made by the importing culture.

One of the most obvious consequences of imported icons can be seen in the way the rituals of local enterprises change and adapt. For instance, the entrance of fast-food stores such as McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway to Istanbul has stimulated and changed the previous rituals of traditional and local food enterprises. Some of the early and humble *Kebabci, Lahmacun* and *Kofteci* places have transformed into self-service fast-food store chains, engaging in competition with these international and high profile companies. As evidenced by this example and others, today Istanbul is under constant invasion from these global world icons. The combination of the ubiquity of global icons in coexistence with local and global norms manifests itself in many ways; such as, through mass-media, consumer goods, urban and architectural transformation. Likewise, the entire spectrum of the society's behavioral patterns and life-styles has been impacted—while some entertain themselves with a lunch at Pizza Hut or Tatlises Lahmacun, the Turkish interpretation of fast-food stores, others relish in projecting themselves as exact replicas of the American yuppie.

DUALITY OF ISTANBUL'S URBAN ENVIRONMENT AND THE "IN-BETWEEN" ISTANBUL

According to Ihsan Bilgin and Mehmet Karaoren (1998: 38), the city of Istanbul, with ten million inhabitants in the 1980's, had multiple urban problems ranging from transportation, housing, and health to substructure. These urban problems were the result of over forty years of political and administrative shortages whereby existing projects had been either disregarded or were misguided. During the second half of the 1980s, the administrative body of the new government, ANAP, started to produce new "rational and dexterous" projects—accepting, in advance, the impossibility of solving the colossal infrastructure problems of the entire city. In so doing, the government no longer perceived the city holistically as a monolithic milieu.

The purpose of the new projects sponsored by the government was to provide isolated urban settings that would serve as suitable places for major patrons and performers who were involved in the globalization of Istanbul to live and work (Bilgin and Karaoren, 1993: 38). The application of this strategy created a "dual Istanbul"—the first being the city neglected since the 1950s and the second being the city which was planned and overlapped the neglected city (Bilgin and Karaoren, 1993: 38). The existence of these two, dual patterns within immediate proximity—and even overlapping—each other proved problematic. Contradictory alliances of the two formations became inevitable.

The new trend toward globalization necessitated office plazas and also set the stage for the development of two distinct urban patterns: 1) places to accommodate international visitors and business people and 2) new suburbs for prospering young elites. The boom period of the new suburb projects coincides with the period when the business towers and hotel complexes were being developed. In addition to business towers and new suburbs, another type of global-based business icon began to emerge in the public spaces of Istanbul—the big scale shopping mall. The Western concept of a shopping mall came into the arena during the second half of the 1980s and soon became an indispensable part of Istanbul's socio-cultural life

Figure1: Capitol, One of the favorite shopping malls of Istanbul's social life.

The peculiarity of these structures is that they are experienced by a cross section of society—regardless of the economic status, social class, or community from which people originate.

The term "dual city" expresses judiciously the current state of Istanbul, however, it is still hard to draw a distinct line between the "planned" and "neglected" configurations of the city. There are many "in-between" configurations that create today's contrast and chaotic, yet ironically rich and enticing urban environment of Istanbul. Some of these "in between" developments occur in the historically rich districts of the city such as Macka, Ortakoy and Kadikoy.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DISTRICTS AND TRANSFORMATION RATIONALE

When the urban patterns of the three districts are compared many common features are found—despite the different architectural and urban characteristics of each. One of the most obvious similarities among the districts is the central role that each plays within the area it is located. Other similarities include the high density of the population of each district and the fact that each includes both commercial and residential patterns.

When the near history of the three districts is examined, we find that the choices of the people who lived in these areas in the earlier periods provided the districts with their contemporary identities. For example, in Macka during the first half of the twentieth century, the upper-class Turkish and Levantine families started to favor an apartment life-style and moved from their wooden mansions to the newly built apartment buildings of Neo-classic, Gothic revival, Fist National Architecture, and Art Nouveau styles. This movement climaxed in a major building boom in the city.

Two major factors were responsible for people's willingness to move from a long-accepted mansion life-style to an apartment life-style. First, not only were the owners of the mansions rewarded by a large profit if they sold their property, but they also were granted ownership of half of the new apartment building. Secondly, because of the vulnerability of the wooden structures to fire, the mansions required intensive care and maintenance that the owners were not willing or able to sustain. Over time, the idea of moving from a large single family dwelling to a multi-family apartment was mainstream practice, becoming one of the major factors in the transformation of the city into its contemporary "apartmentful" urban identity.

Consequently, as the representative of European culture, the district became the extention of Pera. While at the same time, Ortakoy and Kadikoy, with the more introverted and diverse socio-cultural structure of Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Turkish communities, allowed for the development of more culturally rich and unique urban characteristics. Thus it is that, today, it is through the cultural richness of the old days that the architectural and life patterns of the districts can be traced.

An examination of the contemporary transformations and developments of the three districts provides examples of a certain degree of congruity between the past and contemporary developments. For instance, while Macka preserves its sterility as a representative of European-like life-styles, Ortakoy and Kadikoy provide a more hybrid example of architecture and life patterns. While one feels almost like an invisible wall surrounds Macka, the districts of Ortakoy and Kadikoy create a rich atmosphere by the intermingling of people of different cultures, backgrounds, classes, and ethnicity.

The response of each district to the introduction of global icons and trends into all layers of urban life was found to be peculiar and unique. Observations revealed that the utilization and interpretation of the imported norms and patterns were eminently discrete and different from their original forms. This distinctiveness was interpreted in each district's environmental forms and human behaviors as a combination of local and global icons, trends, and attitudes creating what has been called 'glocal' qualities by social scientists. Interestingly, these glocal interpretations serve, in turn, to accentuate the local qualities of the districts through the addition of global patterns. Hence, it can be argued that, in these districts of Istanbul the diffusion of global norms has helped to emphasize and revitalize them, creating continuity and consistency in the characteristics of change.

Using the Macka district as an example, we can see how this is the case. Macka has always been the place where the patterns of the Western world were dominant and easily tracked. Western norms and qualities have so penetrated the layers of life that, upon entering the district, a person can easily feel oneself in the streets of one of the renown European cities such as London, Paris and Brussels. However, evidence of recent globalization trends can be seen in the gradual transformation of what were once residences into places of business

Figure 2: Once residences, the business structures of Maçka.

Along with this change has come a change in the people who predominantly occupy the district. The previous social fabric of the Macka's community was a composite of Muslim and non-Muslim upper-class families. Today, some of these families continue to persevere, but in lesser numbers and with decreased economic status. The newcomers who have entered the district are young executives and yuppies who work in the internationally and nationally celebrated firms of the district and have adopted the western type of life-style. Although at some costs to the socio-cultural fabric of the district, this trend has served to revitalize the area into a bustling and vibrant mosaic of local and global social norms.

In Ortakoy, as another example, recent changes have helped the district to disclose and strengthen its previous identity both from an architectural and societal point of view. This identity was built upon a marriage between the socio-cultural and urban patterns of three different cultures—Jewish, Greek and Turkish. The years between 1950-80 witnessed a constant decrease in the non-Muslim population and fading of the district's unique identity—based on the togetherness of different cultures. With the reorganization of the Ortakoy Square in 1992, however, the district has regained its previous identity and is once again recognized as the domain of diversity—gaining the sobriquet 'hosgoru meydani' (tolerance square)
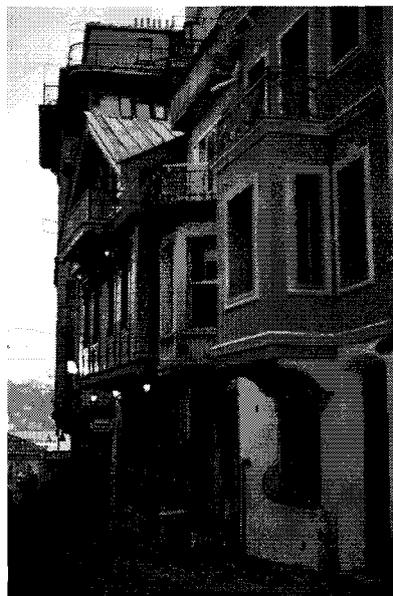

Figure 3: View from one of the alleys of the Ortakoy Square.

Kadikoy also illustrates the heterogeneous, and therefore consistent, nature of contemporary change. Since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, there has been constant change in the district that has transformed it into a vivid center of shopping and social activities. Since this time, Kadikoy has become a center of action for diversity and close relationships between people of different cultures and from various socio-economic backgrounds. Although the new additions that have come as a result of globalization have not radically changed the district's already composite identity, these trends have added a new layer to its fragmented urban quality and accentuated the glocal qualities of the district

Figure 4: Alliance of new and old, Kadiköy.

When the districts are analyzed on a micro scale, we find that while Macka has sustained harmonious and regulated development throughout the district, Ortakoy and Kadikoy show isolated and fragmented urban transformations. For example, Ortakoy Square has been developing independently and in isolation from its surroundings as a result of a small group of entrepreneurs supported by the Besiktas Municipality. This effort has transformed a quiet fisherman's square, with only several tea houses and a fisherman's restaurant frequented by the 'Ortakoylu' into a popular trendy square populated by intellectuals, teenagers and many others.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to portray the characteristics of forces that have been contributing to contemporary changes in the city of Istanbul and her society. The results of this study support the conclusion that all of the districts examined have undergone radical changes during the last two decades, and that the responses of each district to these changes are peculiar to that district because of its historic background, social structure, and architectural infrastructure.

Research supported that rapid and uncontrollable transformation within the urban and socio-cultural fabric contributed the dual character of the city. It can be argued, however, that the definition 'dual city', despite its accuracy in reflecting the obvious dichotomies of the city, still falls short of explaining today's complex formations of Istanbul. During the research, various states of concomitance and transition of polar qualities of the dual city were detected in such things as the existence of "glocal" formations that reflected both local and global influences and "apartkondu," reflecting a mixture of *apartman* and *gecekondu* formations. According to this research, these formations have added to the city's dual, fragmented and multi-dimensional layers and are best described as the "in between" formations.

It is postulated that the globalization process will continue to intensify the polarity and fragmented qualities that are evident throughout the life and urban patterns of the city e.g. local-global, rich-poor, cosmopolite-provincial, legal-illegal, and traditional-modern. However, it is further predicted that because of the close exposure to, and mutual interactions between the contrasting patterns in the city—specifically in publicly used places—the transition between polar socio-cultural norms and urban patterns, namely "in-between" qualities, will burgeon and dominate the urban fabric of the city.

This study reinforces the contradictory nature of Istanbul and bolsters the conclusion that since the beginning of the 1980s, the globalization process has simultaneously torn apart and brought together opposing socio-cultural and urban patterns of the city—in a way peculiar to the city's culture. As Keyder (1999: 26) explains in Istanbul "there is a polarization of space, but also cohabitation of heterogeneous populations."

In fact, the daily rituals of life in the city create vivid interactions that bring people from various classes, social and cultural standings, and economic status together onto common platforms. The icons of the global world unite these people as they share the routines of daily life. These interactions are further reinforced by their constant exposure to the mass-media even when people return to their more isolated spaces.

The constant interaction of people and space, coupled with the continuous sway of mass-media, has brought about a more heterogeneous and hybrid culture. People from different backgrounds are more aware of each other. This, in turn, has manifested itself in interesting and polar outcomes such as; one the one hand, more tolerance and acceptance of life-styles other than one's self; while on the other hand, pursuing to isolate one's self from groups that are different and seeking acceptance into "like" groups.

A conspicuous outcome of the global influence can be seen in what this research study has classified as the "in-between" qualities of norms, activity patterns, consuming attitudes, political views and personal tastes. This "in-between" quality translates not only into the social norms of Istanbul, but also into the urban formations of the city. The globalization process has created an environment where the traditions of the polar extremes are overlapping with the new and old features of the city, creating unusual "in-between" patterns. It is predicted that the continuation of the globalization process will have a consequential impact on the city and society of Istanbul. This impact, while stressing the polar qualities, will accentuate the "in-between" patterns of the city through the overlapping of various urban patterns engendering what will become a true "hybrid city."

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