

## CONSERVATION OF BOSPHORUS' SPIRIT IN SPITE OF THE SPATIAL CONFLICTS AND THREATS

N. DIKER, I. DINCER

*Yildiz Technical University, Department of  
City and Regional Planning Istanbul, Turkey*  
[ndiker@msn.com](mailto:ndiker@msn.com), [icldincer@gmail.com](mailto:icldincer@gmail.com)

AND

Z. ENLIL

*Yildiz Technical University, Department of  
City and Regional Planning Istanbul, Turkey*  
[zeynepenil@superonline.com](mailto:zeynepenil@superonline.com)

**Abstract:** Istanbul has been established in a very special geography where the continents of Europe & Asia merge. It has the Historical Peninsula, Golden Horn, Galata, Beyoglu and Bosphorus sub-regions which are the natural and cultural heritage areas in Istanbul. Since 1970s, these cultural landscapes had been attempted to be conserved through some special status and rules. However, Istanbul has been an attractive center for economic investment in every period. These cultural landscape areas had been under the pressures and threats of changes and transformations as much as the whole of the city. Bosphorus area which will be investigated in this study, had become face to face with the danger of losing her identity and spirit, despite being declared as a “natural and historical conservation area”, being planned as a “conservation area”, and also being controlled by “special legal measures”. The aim of this paper is to explain the threats on the Bosphorus’ spirit as well as proposals for reducing of them.

### 1. Introduction: The Transformation of the Cultural Landscape in the Bosphorus Area

Istanbul’s relationship with water is neither like the canal cities of Venice and Amsterdam, nor like the river cities of London, Paris and Frankfurt (Boysan, 2001). Istanbul has been a city, which grew out of its land walls rather early in its history and stretched linearly along the shorelines. This pattern of linear growth along the Bosphorus and later the Marmara Sea underlined the strong links that the city established

## 2 CONSERVATION OF BOSPHORUS' SPIRIT IN SPITE OF THE SPATIAL CONFLICTS AND THREATS

with water. It was only was in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards that Istanbul's relationship with water was altered and the city began to grow inland. (Yenen et al., 1993) (Figure 1).

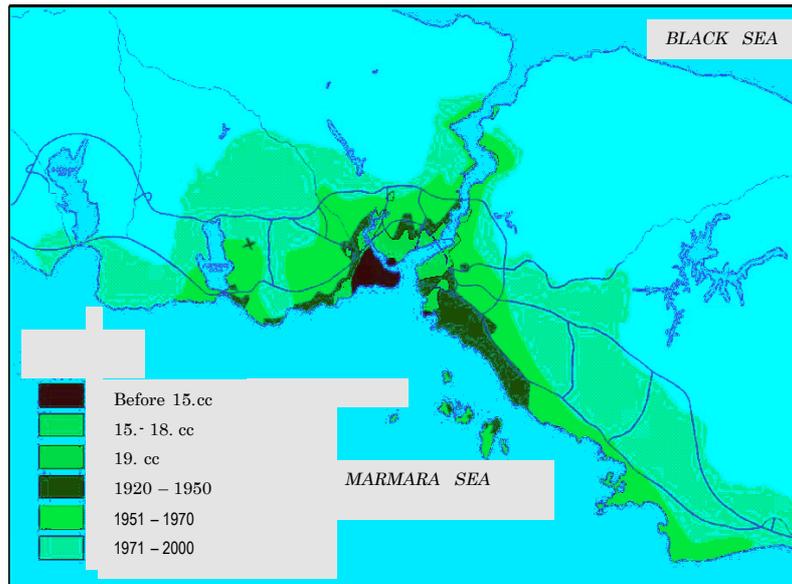


Figure 1. The Historical Growth of Istanbul (IMP, 2005)

The Bosphorus is the place where Istanbul's difference from other cities living with water is felt the most. In the words of Enlil et al.;

*“The interplay of land and water in the Bosphorus, brought with it a perfection of nature; and the interplay of nature and architecture gave way to the perfection of the picturesque. This poetic cultural landscape was formed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was a period of transformations in the Ottoman society. On the one hand, there were reform movements, which targeted the traditional institutions of the society; on the other hand, there was the rise of a new "spirit of worldliness," which brought with it a growing interest in worldly pleasures and an almost hedonistic worldview. This outlook was reflected in many art forms of the period, especially in music, poetry and architecture, and found its utmost reflection along the Bosphorus expressing the 'Bosphorus Civilization'” (Enlil et al., 1998: 257).*

The Bosphorus, although intertwined with mythological stories and hearsay, has a landscape of only palaces, monasteries and churches on both sides and no other settlement in the Byzantine Period (Artan, 1994). Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century settlement in Istanbul was largely confined to the Historical Peninsula and Galata on the European side and to Uskudar in the Anatolian side. Settling outside the fortifications and expanding along the Bosphorus dates back to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>[ZE1]</sup>, whereby the Bosphorus became the ceremonial seasonal retreat of the Ottoman court. It was during 18<sup>th</sup> century that the poetic cultural landscape organically intertwined with nature emerged as a particular product of the changing lifestyles in the Ottoman society. 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand, marked yet another significant change in space and society, which culminated in the transformation of the Bosphorus. It was no longer only a seasonal retreat into the countryside for the Ottoman elite and wealthy. The emergence of regular steam boats and tram lines operating between the city centre and the Bosphorus villages led to the transformation of the settlements along the Bosphorus from seasonal retreats into permanent residential areas for the upper income groups. There was at the same time, a corresponding increase in the numbers of waterfront mansions and palaces spread amongst the humble dwellings in the small fisherman's villages (Figure 2). The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, marks a period of stagnation in Istanbul. Long years of war resulted in further economic decline as well as population loss in the city. This was followed by the loss of its status as the capital city, since Ankara was declared as the capital of the Turkish Republic established after the war. Hence, until the 1950s, the Bosphorus was a rather desolate area, which fell into disuse like many other parts of the "shrinking city." (Tekeli, 1994)

The rise of liberal economical policies in the 1950s made Istanbul the centre of attraction for both investments and population. These circumstances placed an immense pressure of transformation and change onto the Bosphorus as much as the rest of the city, and posed a great threat to the conservation of its natural and cultural identity. In this period, stretching from 1950s to 1980s, the population of Istanbul grew nearly five times and increased from 1 million to 5 million. This rapid growth in population brought with it an equally rapid spatial expansion of the city albeit without a plan or infrastructure (Tekeli, 1994).

#### 4 CONSERVATION OF BOSPHORUS' SPIRIT IN SPITE OF THE SPATIAL CONFLICTS AND THREATS

The globalization dynamics of the 1980s, on the other hand, were a result of the policies, which followed a discourse on giving Istanbul a new identity as an international city of finance and services and the decentralization of industry. During this period under the influence of globalization dynamics, which are still enforce today, the city continues to have the imprints of industrialization process at its fringes while its historical centres face the pressures of the growing service sector. The city's increasing population which reached about 10 million in 2005, constitutes a major threat for sustainable development due to the prevalent pattern of expansion towards the agricultural lands, forests and water basins in the fringes. On the other hand, the large capital exerts immense pressures on city centres forcing the historical fabric to transform. This process causes a great risk in terms of the conservation of the natural and cultural identity of especially the Historical Peninsula, the Goldenhorn, Galata-Beyoglu and the Bosphorus Area.

The study is based upon the evaluations of a research carried in 1998 by two of the authors of this paper (Enlil et al., 1998), and, aims to, re-read the Bosphorus in light of the changing societal dynamics over the last ten years since 1998. In other words, an attempt is made here to assess as of 2008 the current state of affairs that has put the Bosphorus under the threat of loosing its spirit and identity as a cultural landscape since the 1950s.

#### **2. The Emergence of Threats in the Bosphorus Area: 1950-1980**

It is possible to examine the impacts of the policies attracting population and capital to Istanbul since the 1950s, on the Bosphorus area from various different angles. But, two primary transportation decisions must be particularly mentioned.

The first these was realised towards the end of the 1950s. It was a decision about the transportation axis that stretched from the Historical Peninsula to Beyoglu and along which the CBD was located. This axis was stretched and expanded towards north along the ridges of the Bosphorus as the Levent-Maslak axis. The 1966 Plan of Industrial Areas in Istanbul also backed this decision, and allocated plots and large tracts of land for the newly developing industry of the country along this axis. This had two ramifications upon the

Bosphorus. First, the emergent upper income classes in Istanbul again favoured the Bosphorus and began to build waterfront mansions along the coasts and villas on the hills overlooking the Bosphorus. Second, the workers, occupied the public lands on the valleys and slopes of the Bosphorus and built squatter housing (*gecekond* in search for a solution for their housing problems) (Aysu, 1989). The housing areas created through different processes by both of these two groups must be considered as the principle factors leading to the emergence of a totally different spirit in the Bosphorus, a process that still continues during the 2000s.

The second implementation in transportation critical for the Bosphorus was realised at the beginning of the 1970s. The First Bosphorus Bridge that was opened to service in 1973 connected the two parts of the city by a motorway that was hitherto connected to each other by boats and ferries and paved the way for a new culture of life dependent on cars. This new mode of crossing the Bosphorus, which doomed the city to the use of overland transportation led to discussions in favour of second and third bridges. On the other hand, the motorway system and its access roads, which improved the links to the ridges of the Bosphorus, triggered a rapid development in these areas.. The Bosphorus villages that once lived with a culture of commuter ferries and piers, and that were connected to the centre with a narrow coastal road began to lose their calm, countryside feel that they had since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the effects of the bridge and the motorways encircling the city they, thus, become just another settlement in Istanbul, (Çubuk, 1994).

On the other hand, 1970s were also the years when the first steps towards conserving the Bosphorus were taken. The listing of the waterfront mansions, a principle component of the identity of the Bosphorus, in 1970 by the High Council of Immovable Historical Works and Monuments; the preparation of the 1971 'Plan of Waterfront Mansions and Coastal Strip,' which covered the whole area of the Bosphorus; and the registration of the area in 1973 as a designated natural and historical site to be protected (Zeren Gülersoy, 1995) were the main steps taken towards conservation. These acts were the first examples of the institutionalization of the implementations of conservation in Turkey, but they should also be considered as a protective reflex against the ever increasing pressures of building developments over the city of Istanbul and the Bosphorus.

### **3. The Period of Legal Developments Conserving and Threatening the Spirit of the Bosphorus: 1980-2000**

By 1980s, Istanbul was a metropolis that has received an intense migration, developed without a plan and thus, was struggling with problems of infrastructure. The neo-liberal policies implemented by the centre-right wing governments, laid the foundations of a speculative urban land market, together with the vision of a world city projected for Istanbul. The upper and lower sections of the society, who were the central targets in the politics of the period, were also the ones who benefited from this market the most (Enlil et al., 1998).

The first ten years of this period could be defined as a time when on the one hand enactments for the conservation of the Bosphorus area were passed, yet on the other hand, new laws changing its identity from the ground up were put forward.

The acts for the conservation of the Bosphorus that started in the 1970s led to the approval of the 1983 Bosphorus Master Plan, which was strong on the conservation front. The Bosphorus Law aiming to strengthen the implementation of the plan and to conserve the Bosphorus through constituting a separate system of administration was carried through shortly after the approval of the plan. The plan and the law zoned the Bosphorus according to the location in relation to the coast into the areas of 'waterfront and primary skyline' allocated mainly for recreational uses and tourism, restricted for new development; and 'secondary skyline and hinterland' allocated for only very low density residential developments (Figure 3).

However, the new articles regarding the Bosphorus that were added to the new Urban Development Law in 1985 changed the essential principles of both the Bosphorus Plan and Law. Enlil et al. (1998) define these changes as "*offering pieces of the [urban land rent] pie in golden plates to the upper and lower segments of the society.*" They stress the fact that these arrangements made for the benefit of both these segments of the society make up the fundamental threats leading to the loss of the identity of the Bosphorus..

The article generating the most change was proposing the right to develop the woods under private ownership in the Bosphorus, even if it was limited with a floor area ratio of 6 percent. In practice, however, the resulting effects of this permission for developments in the woods

that are mostly on the slopes of the primary skyline zone and that make the foundations of the cultural landscape of the Bosphorus were much more drastic over the skyline and the predominantly recreational and green area identity of the Bosphorus. These areas on the slopes started to transform into housing functions. A total of 1335 villas were built in that time forming the gated communities of the upper income groups (Zeren Gülersoy, 1995).

A second enactment that changed the identity of the Bosphorus was the legalisation of all the illegal housing that was built in the Bosphorus area till that time. With the Urban Development Law of 1985, a total of 1119 buildings were legalised in the Bosphorus area that used to be excluded in the laws granting pardons before. There was a reaction to the law by the society and a lawsuit against the relevant articles of the Development Law was brought up by the opposing party and the Constitutional Court came up with the decision to cancel the articles, in December 1986. The decision of the Court was delayed to be officially announced on *Official Gazette* and it was finally announced in April 1987. The buildings that are mentioned before were built and granted construction permits in this period (Zeren Gülersoy, 1995).

Another important law that played a determining role in the transformation of the identity of the Bosphorus was the 1982 Law on the Promotion of Tourism. This law was enacted to encourage tourism that was considered the most important sector in the economy of the country. It gave significantly increased rights of development in plots designated as “areas of tourism and trade” by the Cabinet. The law affected the Bosphorus skyline in two ways. On the one hand, there rose grandiose buildings in the gardens of the Ottoman Palaces with building permits granted for five star hotels (Enlil et al., 1998). On the other hand, centres of tourism and trade were designated along the ridges of the Bosphorus, on the Levent-Maslak axis that was widened and was subject to industrial investments in the mid 1950s, supporting the idea of making Istanbul a service and finance city. This axis that rapidly transformed from the function of industry into office buildings, both created a pressure of functional transformation from the ridge on which it is located towards the slopes of the Bosphorus and also marked itself in the silhouette as the skyscraper zone of Istanbul (Figure 4).

#### **4. Threats over Bosphorus Created by the Increasing Uncertainty: Post-2000**

The 2000s could be defined by the struggles of evolving from an industrial city into a service city for Istanbul. In our present day, when the industrial employment rates are still very high, Istanbul keeps at the competition of attracting international capital (Öktem, 2005). However, this structure which is not based on productive sectors and which triggers consumption, both raises the urban land values in a speculative way, and makes the city much more open to the socio-economic and cultural structures in the world, therefore open to uncertainty. This state of uncertainty keeps the management of the transportation and infrastructure of the metropolis with a population reaching 12 million under threat, as much as the rehabilitation of the historical centres and the renovation of the gecekondü areas at its fringes. On the other hand, the effects of the concept of sustainability gaining strength among the society and the emergence of a social front against the policies implemented in urban regeneration processes increase the chances of fighting back against this uncertainty.

The Bosphorus area and the Historical Peninsula, Galata and Beyoğlu appear as locations where these processes are experienced the sharpest. The situation created by the fissures that the laws of the 80s made in the conservation based approached of the 1970s, combined with and the uncertainty of the 2000s made the Bosphorus area harder and harder to manage and control. It is possible to define this uncertainty under a few main headings in the limited coverage of this paper:

The first one of these is the fact that the hierarchical and horizontal structures in the government, planning and implementation of the city are no longer in order. There is no denying the fact that the wide scoped rational planning methods aiming to 'predict the future and propose a new order' are not enough as tool to deal with the multi variable and uncertain circumstances of our day. However, the solution of the problem does not lie in making the planning and other relevant institutions dysfunctional and breaking them into ever smaller pieces, creating a chaos of power and responsibilities. Today in the Bosphorus area the Cabinet, the Bosphorus High Council for Building Coordination, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, four separate

district municipalities, two separate Councils for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Works on either side of the Bosphorus, and apart from these the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Forestry, the Office of Privatization are all appointed independently with the power to make decisions. The lack of communication and coordination between these institutions lead to the impossibility of managing space with a harmonised concept and therefore by feeding the state of uncertainty, pose a threat to the identity of the Bosphorus.

A second issue is the uncertainty of the fate of the illegal buildings in the area due to the Law of 1985. These buildings which should be demolished according to the decision of cancellation by the Constitutional Court still exist because of the irresolute conduct of the local municipalities. On the other hand, the urban regeneration projects developed by the local authorities for these areas are conceived as projects of gentrification and thus lead to the emergence of a civil movement. On this matter neighbourhood associations are being formed and these associations are mostly supported by the Non-Governmental Organisations and academic circles. The discussions that are being lead by the associations are as follows: The building rights and pardons granted to both the upper income and lower income groups by the 1985 law are cancelled by the Constitutional Court. If the main intention is the protection of the Bosphorus, all sections of the society should be approached on an equalitarian basis and both of these areas should be reconstituted in accordance to the Bosphorus identity. These discussions put the revision of the Bosphorus Law and Plan on the agenda, but as a change is not realised yet, the state of uncertainty persists.

The third phenomenon is the developments on the Levent-Maslak axis, the new CBD of Istanbul with national and international office buildings and banks. One of the most discussed issues on this is the way the building rights are increased on the mostly public owned empty plots that are left, which are becoming a lot less in time, by making alterations in the plan decisions. The public institutions that are after maximising their profits in the area, where land values are very high even on an international scale, ignore the ever increasing problems of traffic and infrastructure building up in the area. The lawsuits brought up by the professional chambers representing the mounting social opposition against these practices create a tense environment between public institutions-civil society-capital, while at

the same time the court cases taking very long to reach a decision feed the state of uncertainty.

This practice causes discussions due to its effect on changing the silhouette of the Bosphorus, but more importantly it triggers the transformation of the roads connecting the Levent-Maslak axis down to the coast of the Bosphorus, running through the valleys where there used to be the *gecekondus* of the previous period, into the functions of trade, offices and services. So, the housing function, one of the principle characteristics of the identity of Bosphorus is exchanged for the functions of the service sector raising the demands for population and transportation. These functions that differ from housing in terms of size and spatial arrangement are new and alien factors, and pose a serious threat against conserving the spirit of the Bosphorus.

### **5. Conclusion: Could Bosphorus Conserve its Spirit Against the State of Uncertainty?**

If against all uncertainties, threats, conflicts and adverse developments the Bosphorus can still survive and keep its attractiveness intact today; perhaps this is a sign of the strength and protective quality of its spirit. However, the sustainability of this situation is continually under threat. To be able to make sense of the dynamic, complicated and rapid changing structure of the globalising social system of our day, a simple, yet comprehensive and at the same time flexible framework is needed. For the society to go through this accelerating process of transformation with the least pain and suffering, and for social systems to be able to develop while preserving their identities; 'planning too, should renew itself' and earn its position once more. According to the communicative rationality principle developing in the field of planning in the last few years, the aim of planning should be to bring together different actors in an environment of mutual understanding and learning, to define problems according to their priorities, to produce solutions-alternatives, to choose the one amongst these that would be of most benefit to the public, to plan-program and share the roles-responsibilities to be able to realise the implementation in harmony (Diker Çamlıbel, 2003). In areas like the Bosphorus where the developments are severely dynamic, where various different actors have various different expectations and demands, it seems that it is

only possible to overcome the threats and conflicts created by uncertainties through following such a course.