Concept of 'Identity' in designing the future-case of historical peninsula in İstanbul

Identity is the key to a subjective reality and all subjective realities are in a dialectic relation with the society. This phenomenon is shaped by social process and is protected, modified or re-shaped through social relations. In this process, the factors of communication and culture are important. (Christmann G.B., p.10)

In the ideal designs of the new urban regions; national identity is presented, the values are changed, however, an understanding of protection that "future can not exist without the past" is acquired. (Scoffham E., p.162)

Globalization – Identity and İstanbul

With globalization; concepts of national identity, regional and local identity acquired importance:
. In national identity; mentality is the main factor and it has two dimensions as cultural and political
. regional identity; includes the participation of the region in economic, political, cultural and social life. However,
. local identity; the concept of identity in sociological researches is nor so much related to the whole city, on the contrary, it is used together mainly with urban parts and neighboring settlements. (Christmann G.B., p.17-19)

Together with the globalization process, the gradual formation of single-type of living environments is making the cities monotonous. It brings the result of the destruction of the dominant culture by this process. On the other hand, globalization processes influence the whole world. Here, some places are on the foreground, some are loosing their significance. (Aslanoğlu R., p.142)

İstanbul had always been a city of migration having a mobile and cosmopolite population since the past. However, until 1950′s the complex characteristics of the inhabitants of İstanbul were generally united at the platform of "being an inhabitant of a city". The diversity in the city is perceived through its "religious" differences, which the historical heritage had conveyed to the city.

After 1950, İstanbul, not only acquired population rapidly, but also the accustomed diversity of the population living in the old city had changed. The mass migration process during the last fifty years, caused the settlement of the different groups, which came to İstanbul from various regions of the country at various periods, with different 'cultural′ characteristics that they had brought with themselves when they were coming to the city. (Keyder C., p.192, 197) The old, elite, non-Muslim inhabitants of İstanbul left the city by external migration. As a result, each of the new groups coming to the city was able to settle without any resistance from the local inhabitants of the city and without experiencing the feeling of provincialism.

After mid-1980′s, there is a spreading consensus regarding the conversion of İstanbul into a 'global′ city. Within the frame of this campaign, which means a competition with the other cities, the cultural identity of a city and the image it creates has a key role (Keyder Ç., p. 98) and emphasizing the specific characteristics of locations is important. (Burkner, H.-J.)

Although the identity of a city and its discriminative characteristics are gradually acquiring more importance within this process, these are also controversial matters. Especially when a city having a past with different and numerous layers such as İstanbul is the point at issue, the matter of 'which past should be protected, mobilized and marketed' becomes a political problem that has vital significance. (Keyder Ç., p. 44)

When the interaction of İstanbul with global processes is assessed, first, the influence of its historical advantages is seen. (Aslanoğlu R.P.150) However, unfortunately, as the cultural assets of the city disappear, the urban identity is also disappearing. It is turning into a city with new but mainly poor-quality buildings and a city without an urban identity. However, the historical buildings were reflecting a social structure, an identity and 'who were living there' was being perceived. (Erdem, S. E.)

Urban Identity and the Development of Urban Culture

Basically, a city is within the integrity of the cultural meaning and significance of its region and country. This cultural integrity is influential in the development of the city; it is related to the historical events and it can not be separated from its historical past (for example; technical, economical, political, legal developments etc.) Besides this, a special urban culture and, together with this, an urban identity is created within the frame of urban life.

The (communicative) behavior of the administrators and the public shape the city. Today, local development potentials are being activated under the local identity concept. With the formation of the connections between the local actors, the local institutes, the local media and public organizations; the public's activity, which is assumed to be lost, is tried to be revivified.

Based on the communicational initiations with the discussions that concern the city, the past and present realities of the city are being presented and its influence on the public's personal identities is being evaluated. (Christmann G.B., p.20,21)

The cities form an economical, cultural and social structure to sustain the human life. The reflection of the social life and cultures, which are shaped by the historical process, on the present physical space forms the urban identity. The individuals and social groups are connected to each other by the physical spaces, where we live in, that are created by the social processes. The identity is not only a product of social structure. The conversion experienced by the space based on the efforts for giving a meaning to the space where the life is lived in, also shapes the structure of the society.

Historical Peninsula – Yedikule Region and Urban Identity

Based on the urbanization, which gained acceleration in general in the country after 1950's, the significance of the historical peninsula regarding the population had decreases as a result of the rapid growth of the surrounding counties of the metropolitan area of İstanbul. The historical peninsula, which is now the central business area of İstanbul and Türkiye, is now serving more population than its own, and the settlement areas of the peninsula and as a result of this, the population, had started to decrease gradually.

Yedikule gate is located on the city walls of the historical peninsula. After an expedition,, the emperor and the commanders, who had won a victory, were entering through this gate, which became a part of the fortress, and Byzantines named this gate as 'The Golden Gate' (Belge M., p.51)

In the past, 'Yedikule' was constructed as a fortress, afterwards, it was used as a dungeon and today, as a museum, it has a landmark character. Moreover, 'Yedikule' location is accepted as a focal point for the land and rail transport connections. Yedikule, as Zeyrek, Süleymaniye and Cankurtaran which are all located within the peninsula, is also a secondary settlement area distinct with its historical buildings, road-texture characteristics, topographical and artificial limitations.

The problems in physical space of Yedikule
. There is no trace of the route that remained from the past which extended to the 'Golden Gate'.
. Yedikule dungeons, which are used for cultural purposes are closed for the utilization of the inhabitants of the region.
. Beside the regional structure, there are poor-quality buildings and facades on the main land traffic axis reaching Yedikule and the other axis connected to this one
. The inconvenient life environments due to the non-maintained condition and wrong utilization of the old and quality buildings
. The building heights, which are usually 3 floors, are exceeded in many locations, which prevent or complicate the perception of the city wall structure and its environment
. Regarding the texture and the volume, the multi-floor new buildings with adjoining order in the region are not in conformity with the old buildings which reflect the real character of the region
. There are regions which are congested by traffic, such as the mosque and church areas within the housing areas.
. Along the city wall, there are insecure areas for the inhabitants of the region
. The economical and the cultural level of the people of the region, who mainly migrated from Anatolia, is low
. The solidarity and adopting the life environment is lacking in the people of the region

The potentials regarding the urban identity:
. 'Golden Gate', as a symbol, is located in this region
. The traces and samples of the public structures and house textures of the past can still be seen
. The structures of the ancient texture gives qualified facades and perspectives to the region.
(Urban Design Course-Architecture 4)

As a result, the conversion experienced by the urban space shapes the individuals and the social groups. The Historical Peninsula is important both due to serving as a capital of many civilizations in the history and due to being a region where the trade, employment and tourism is intense today. At Yedikule Gate in the city walls, which restricts this important historical region, and within the city wall environment; it is possible to see the results that are based on the problems such as the migration which the city had received as a result of the wrong modernization plans of İstanbul and wrong investment plans. Yedikule region, where we see a small-scale sample of the city where the people of different religions, orders, culture and race come together today as in the past, is also showing a kind of resistance in order to protect its nature and identity.

The change in the culture and space that is experienced together with the globalization increased its influence on the streets, which are the most active element of the urban space and the urban symbols that are formed by such streets. The examination of the interaction between the old and the new spaces and re-evaluation of the street-people relations are required. Because, the streets in the historical urban structure are spaces where people meet each other and where the social relations are sustained. A sample of pedestrianization

of a house street is realized at Yedikule region and it had given an important meaning and a new identity to its surrounding. The future perspective that is required should be the perception of the city by every individual, who is living in the urban space, as his own home.

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