

Transformation of Urban Public Space in Reinventing Local Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to compete in the global market and to maximize their share of global capital, cities are in search of the best congruent vision to take place in this competition. In this regard, regeneration projects are the most effectively and widely applied tool to achieve this vision.

Located on the west coast of the Aegean Sea and the third biggest city of Turkey, Izmir is inevitably involved in the competition to be a world city. Hence, several regeneration projects are on the agenda of the municipality, stakeholders and entrepreneurs in order to rebuild Izmir's image and to reinvent its identity.

In this context, we will discuss the effects of transformation projects on public places, and question the publicness of these places. One of the most striking changes that occur during the *transformation of urban space* is the blurring of boundaries between private and public space. A recent trend in transformation is the increasing *privatization of public space* and the emergence of *quasi public spaces*.

In evaluating publicness we will apply to the criteria defined by Hannah Arendt (1958) and interpreted by Dijkstra (2000) According to Arendt public places should;

- *Be accessible by all* (the lack of social segregation is an important indicator of that criterion)
- *Be used by all* (this criterion refers to the level of tolerance to individual freedom in a public space)
- *Outlast one generation* (here, value of the public space for cultural identity is important)

Our evaluation is based on the two short transformation histories of *Konak Square* and *Konak Pier*. The square and the pier were acknowledged as historical values in Izmir's vision of *tourism and trade-based regeneration*. Both are historical heritage sites, and we will discuss authenticity claims and the two projects' value for cultural identity. Konak Square is a city square at the historic centre of Izmir located near the traditional shopping centre (bazaar), Kemeralti. Konak Pier, recently transformed from the historic fish market rumoured to be designed by Gustave Eiffel in the 1870s, is a shopping mall at the close vicinity of the square. During our evaluation it had become clear that Arendt's criteria may not fully apply to Konak Pier as it is a semi-closed public space in the form of a shopping mall. Therefore we have shifted the focus of our evaluation to property changes and the effects of these changes over publicness.

Observations, interviews and questionnaires were employed while we were gathering data for our study. Questionnaires were given to 50 users of Konak Square. Unfortunately, surveying the users of Konak Pier was not allowed by the management of Konak Pier for reasons unrevealed to us, so our discussion was limited to observations made by the papers' authors.



Fig. 1: Locations of Konak Pier and Konak Square in Historic Center, 2006
Source: Izmir Life Vol.39, April 2004, p.92

III. PROFILE OF THE CITY OF IZMIR: IMAGE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Since the late 1980s Izmir Metropolitan Municipality is undertaking the attempt to reconstruct a new city image and provide local economic development through regeneration projects. Izmir has been growing and changing through a lot of projects based on regeneration and development concepts since the end of the 20th century. Recently, the trend of culture-led regeneration projects that target historical and cultural values are in the forefront of the municipality's agenda.

Tourism, which is a growing sector of the city's economy, is a dominant factor in managing urban development and urban transformation. As Beriatos argues, the integration of *built heritage* and *innovative design* has become strategically important for regeneration projects that aim to transform urban landscapes (Beriatos, 2004). Izmir having a rich built heritage spanning different historical periods, also employs the discourse of historical preservation in revitalizing the city.

Although Izmir has very important cultural and urban values belonging to its past, the traces of this heritage can not be easily be perceived. Izmir which was formed under the influence of different political, cultural and economical structures in a five-thousand-year historical period is now facing significant shift in terms of identity. The city witnessed significant fires and earthquakes and has lost most of its 19th century settlement pattern.

In the historical centre there are several special projects that intervene into the historical and cultural identity and to create a kind of publicness in the context of *tourism and trade-based regeneration*. These projects are 1) 'Konak Square Special Project Area', 2)'Altın Yol Ancient Road Special Project Area', 3) 'Ancient Stadium Special Project Area', 4) 'Ancient Theatre Special Project Area', 5)'Kadifekale Special Project Area',6) 'Ali Paşa Square Special Project Area', 7)'Hisarönü Mosque Special Project Area', and 8) 'Agora Special Project Area'. The Regeneration of Izmir Project comprises historical squares, khans, several streets, buildings, cultural centres, fountains, and restoration of old houses.

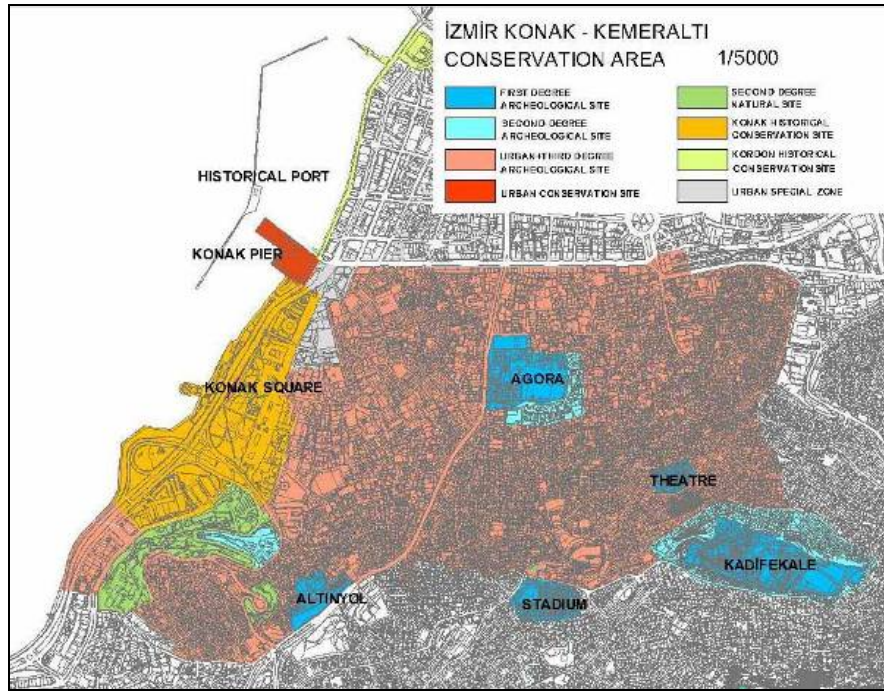


Fig. 2: İzmir Konak-Kemeraltı Conservation Area
Source: İzmir Metropolitan Municipality Archive

Among these projects, 'Agora and its surroundings conservation development and revitalization project' is the most important one in İzmir's *historic-led vision*. The Agora project is the most convenient point for creating a specific area that is congruent with the urban life and urban values of the city history. Agora and the other historical nodes such as Kemeraltı traditional shopping centre (bazaar), theatre, Kadifekale ancient castle and old stadium have constituted the spine of the ancient city pattern in the south-east direction. The İzmir Metropolitan Municipality has identified Agora as a beginning point for the regeneration of the traditional centre (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2002).

In the context of mega-events to be held in İzmir, *Universiade 2005* was organized. In order to provide the infrastructure for this organization; sports halls, pools and stadia were built and renewed. Some main roads were rearranged and places for the accommodation of athletes were constructed. This organization was intended to put İzmir on the map as a World city. Following this mega-event, nowadays, public and private authorities have been trying for *Expo 2015* to be organized in İzmir.

In addition to the projects that are mentioned above Konak Pier and Konak Square are the other examples of regeneration projects. In those areas two different themes are considered; one of them is the usage of Konak Square as a public area and the other is Konak Pier refunctioned as a shopping mall.

Actually, this project determines an eclectic axis, which includes remains of different historical periods. This extends from Kadifekale to Konak Square passing through Roman city and Ottoman remains on it. The project is a cosmetic presentation of the historic centre with its route and the buildings that will be restored. That strategy includes an elitist and eclectic vision, which excludes the other axis and lands of the region. At this point, the question of 'how this axis and buildings in a completely historical zone are chosen' arises.

III. THE SPATIAL SCALE OF THE STUDY

Konak Square

Konak Square is located in the historic centre, between the traditional Bazaar (Kemeraltı) and Izmir Gulf. Metro stations, ferry port and bus stops surround the square. The proximity of the square to the sea and the port affect its use. The edges of the square are defined by the starting points of the axes that lead to the bazaar, the shore, and high-profile business and entertainment districts.

Formation of Konak Square dates back to early 1800s. The square has functioned as the entrance of the city and has become a visual symbol. There are important events, which characterize the changes in the square.



Fig. 3: Konak Square, 1930s
Source: Izmir City Archive Museum

Between 1818 and 1933 symbolic buildings started to emerge under Ottoman reforms. 'Ayşe Hatun Mosque' as the oldest structure in the square and important governmental buildings were constructed. Government Building the Clock Tower and the Mosque from that period are still surviving whereas merely the wall of Yellow Barracks remains (Yılmaz, 2003).

In 1930s transportation routes were changed by the construction of a tram line through the square, and by the construction of a major boulevard which connects the square with the other parts of the city. Thus the importance of Konak Square increased and it became the centre of the city.

After 1955 the square was changed many times. Until 1990s vehicular transportation dominated the usage of the square, whereas after the latest intervention the square is characterized by users who spend their leisure time in it. Yet, the square always has reflected characteristics of a public space.



Fig 4: Konak Square, 2006
Source: <http://www.wowturkey.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=245106>

The latest design of Konak Square is the result of an image-led transformation project. The design is based on the historical traces left in the square. For instance remnants of the wall of the Yellow Barracks and the trace of the old port are revealed in the design. The Clock Tower as a symbol of Izmir is emphasized through a different pavement material around it. Information billboards stand in front of the historical structures.

Traffic is kept out of the square and pedestrian use within public space was encouraged. Coastal traffic flow was moved underground in order to enable the connection of the square to the seaside. Several landscape arrangements, such as City History Park, Artists' Park and Cactus Garden was organized to enrich the open public space.

Walking routes to the seaport, traditional bazaar, and the metro stations are designed with different kinds of paving. The design provides ample street furniture such as benches and sitting areas for the users. As it can be expected from an image-led project, several cosmetic architectural design elements such as; ship-themed tensile structures and sculptures and parasols define the square.

Observations and Evaluations on Konak Square

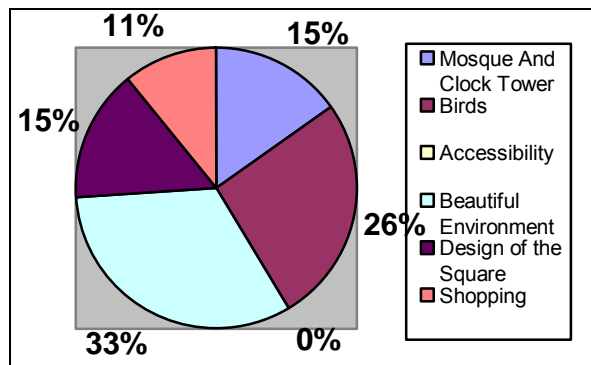
In the field survey, some observations and questionnaires are to be tested in the empirical part of this research. This questionnaire included 15 questions that target the users and their behaviour. It also aimed to reveal which facilities and activities in Konak Square were embraced by the users.

As we mentioned in the introduction, Arendt's conceptualization for defining the success of a public space is used as the basis for the discussions on Konak Square. Publicness of the square is evaluated by its *accessibility by all*, that is should *outlast one generation*, and be *used by all* (Arendt, 1958).

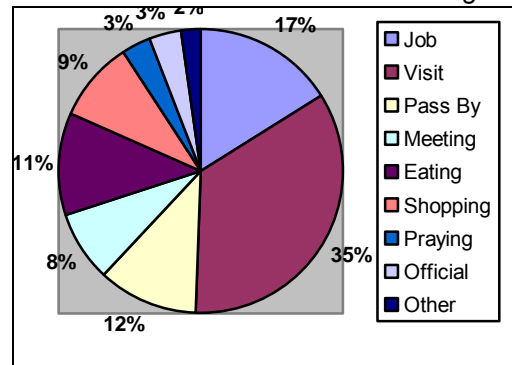
According to Arendt a public space should be accessible by all social groups without any restriction by design or management and prevent social segregation. For Dijkstra factors that affect accessibility by all are *draw factor, costs of accessibility, physical proximity, residences, jobs, shops and food-drink facilities, boutiques and specialty stores, design and non-physical influences*. (Dijkstra, 2000).

There is no spatial segregation in the Konak Square. However, observations and questionnaires indicate that some people passing through the square do not want to be with "wrong people" (Lofland, 2000). Such responses to the questionnaire indicate social and ethnic segregation exists in the area.

Draw factor is important to measure that users are not only people that have jobs, shops, residences around, but also people who come for the "appeal the public space has." (Dijkstra, 2000) Konak Square is surrounded by governmental facilities, municipality buildings, medical buildings, and shops. However, the users are not only people who come to work. Results of the questionnaire indicate a highly touristic character of the square. The field survey showed that there are also people who come to see the Clock Tower, to spend time, to meet friends, to enjoy the sea view and the weather.



Attractions of the Square



Activities in Konak Square

Users were also asked whether they found the social activities organized in the square adequate. These users responded that activities they most wanted to see in the square were concerts, exhibitions, dance, sport and entertainment and that the square can be revitalized by these activities especially at night.

Public space should be accessible for all citizens in an appropriate time and distance, and public transportation should be integral to the strategy of planning public spaces (Dijkstra, 2000). Equal public transportation opportunities are not provided for Konak Square. Although the square is in the intersection of ferry and metro lines geographically disadvantaged districts (such as Gaziemir, Cigli and others), which are located far from the square and to the ferry and metro stations, can not arrive in a short time. Moreover, public buses are more expensive to distant areas of the city.

Physical proximity defines the proximity of different land uses around public space, which affects the quality of publicness. According to Dijkstra, mixed use areas such as squares, increase the diversity of users who communicate with each other in public spaces.(Dijkstra, 2000). In addition to the institutions, such as various government buildings, hospitals, municipality building, shopping areas, and cultural centres, Konak Square is in proximity of housing areas. This mixed-use structure around the square supports its publicness. Similarly, *residences* in short walking distance to Konak Square enhance the life of the square since citizens can reach on-foot.

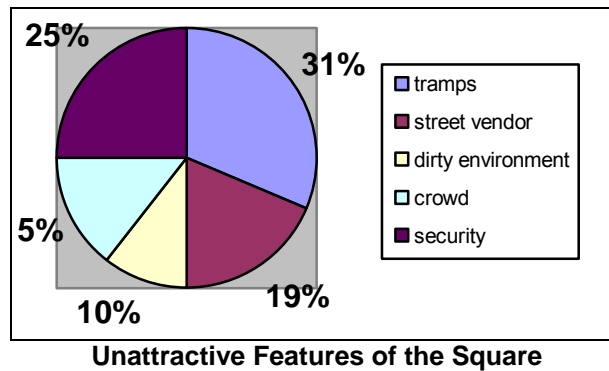
Accessibility by all increases the variety of *jobs* near a public space. Positioned closely to the Central Business District of Izmir, Konak Square includes a variety of jobs that range from official jobs and merchants to manufacturers and street-vendors. The price range of the *shops, food and drink facilities, boutiques and specialty stores* affect the types of users attracted to the public space. Konak Square is near the traditional shopping centre, the Kemeralti bazaar, where a large variety of shops and prices that attract all income groups can be found. On the other hand, there are not many food and drink facilities at Konak Square, pushing those using the square towards the bazaar. Thus these characteristics of the Kemeralti traditional shopping centre complement the usage of the square by all.

According to Dijkstra (2000) the *design* factor affects accessibility. For instance, if the design allows only private car users, this can eliminate those without a car (Dijkstra, 2000). This design factor is not a limitation at Konak Square. It is an open public space surrounded by public transport opportunities, and the square does not eliminate the people without private cars as most shopping malls do.

Non-physical influences are “restrictive rules” such as “drinking alcohol in public, the possession, use of selling of certain types of drugs, prostitution, graffiti, or drinking under age 21.” Dijkstra states that, these may change the usage and perception of a public space (Dijkstra, 2000). There are certain rules against drugs, alcohol and etc. in public spaces in

Turkey. Alcohol is allowed only by permission, in those places. However, alcoholics, beggars, street-vendors, fortune-tellers were confronted during our observations in Konak Square. Although we could infrequently observe them, they don't constitute a defined marginal group. The findings of the questionnaire indicate that tramps are most disturbing for the users of the square. Although there is not any event that occurred in the square, people feel unsafe in regard to those members of the society.

The criterion of being *Used by all* is related to the activities that can be tolerated in the public spaces. Control and power, rule-makers and laws can be discussed under this title. These issues are debated through the concepts of "the panopticon" or "anarchic spaces" depending on the degree of control over the public space. If the sense of security is exaggerated, public spaces transform into "panoptic" spaces where people are under the pressure of surveillance. On the contrary, if an activity, which disturbs the others, is not prevented, this may cause chaos and anarchic spaces. Moreover, public space should not be dominated by any particular group (Dijkstra, 2000).



According to the field survey of Konak Square, there is no tension or conflict between people and police or between any groups using the square. Although some people expressed their complaints about the "wrong people", there is no certain group dominating the square. There are policemen in the entrance of the traditional Kemeraltı bazaar in order to prevent burglary. and camera surveillance in the square. However, these measures do not turn the square into a panoptic environment. It might be claimed that a *desirable social control* is provided.

According to Arendt another criterion of publicness is that the place should *Outlast one generation*; that it should provide *history for all*; that is *collective memory*. Historical artefacts symbolize the collective past. Knowledge about the artefacts, their preservation, authenticity and, originality are major symbolic values of the public space (Dijkstra, 2000).

Konak Square is registered as a historic site. There are historical structures such as Yellow Barracks constructed in 1826 used as a government building; Ayşe Hatun Mosque constructed in the 18th century; Monument to the Turkish Independence War and the Clock Tower that symbolizes modernization. Trace of the Yellow Barracks wall is emphasized in the new design, but it is not recognizable by most people that participated in the field survey and it is not noticed that the barracks used to stand there.

Konak Pier

Izmir has been attracting shopping mall development as a result of the recent transformation in Turkish urban lifestyles since the early 1990s. However, traditional shopping areas—particularly weekly neighbourhood markets—are still popular places, where consumers can buy almost anything ranging from food to clothes. These places occupy a significant place in the collective memory of citizens. On the contrary, common shopping malls are built

independent of the existing local shopping habits. Located mostly at suburban settlements, these places aim to attract exclusively middle and higher income groups.

People are attracted to shopping malls preferring to shop in a safe and hygienic environment.. Meanwhile many shopping malls also offer activities such as movies, entertainment, food facilities, and leisure. The reason why many choose this type of shopping is because “a mall is a far more controlled environment than a city square or city streets” and it “has far greater potential for exclusion” (Dijkstra, 2000).

Konak Pier is a different type of mall in comparison to roadside suburban malls. Reportedly constructed by Gustav Eiffel in 1876 the building was used as a customs house in the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1930s it was used as an open fish market where people could walk around without shopping. After the market was moved it was left unoccupied for a decade. Building renovation and transformation into a shopping complex begun in 1997 and is in use since 2002.

The property owners of Konak Pier have changed many times. Each owner determined a different use for the building. In the context of Izmir’s Regeneration Projects the building was transformed by the private sector regardless of local and historic characteristics.



Konak Pier, 2006

Source: <http://www.wowturkey.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=5866>

The restoration has erased the traces that belong to the history and culture of the place and its links to historical context have been completely removed. Instead an, illusionary environment in the Pier provides decor for acts of consumption where the overriding feeling is that of a mall where entry is closely surveilled and user profile monitored.

For this reason as Shields says it has lost its own publicness and “it has been transformed into owned public space” (Shields, 1992). Now, it represents all the design characteristics of a standard mall with its layout.

However, location of Konak Pier is still an advantage to visit for citizens. It is interesting to note that accessibility is the most important factor because of its location near Konak Square and the traditional centre, Kemeraltı. The people who visited the places around there can also visit Konak Pier easily without using public transportation or cars.

Observations and Evaluations on Konak Pier

Inside Konak Pier, there are shops selling international brands like Nautica, Dockers, Esse, etc. and some high-end bars, cafes, and restaurants which are located on the waterfront. Besides, Tariş, which is Izmir's biggest produce coop and a famous global exporter now, is located within the centre in addition to international movie company CineBonus. This profile of ownership indicates that the enclosed area address the high-end consumer and its expensive needs.

Posters of brands on the elevation of the building prevent the readability of the structure whereas the entrance and the openings of the buildings have lost originality as a result of the recent renovations.



View from Sea



Interior of Konak Pier

Source:<http://www.wowturkey.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=5866>

Considering the particular characteristics of this mall, a few observations were to be tested in as the empirical part of this research. However a questionnaire with a rating consisting of 12 questions related to site and user characteristics was not utilized. The mall management's reluctance to allow this field survey vindicates our conviction about private development and ownership on limiting accessibility to the point of excluding researchers.

On the contrary to the Kemeralti traditional shopping centre near it several on-site observations indicate that Konak Pier users are usually from a homogeneous social group. Accessibility is limited by security personnel according to the orders of the management barring lower income groups from the interior. According to Lofland, *spatial control* in terms of usage and of user profile is an essential element of commodification (Lofland, 2000). Also when the private sector is dominant in a project, security decisions, which control the usage and access of the users, takes priority.

Another interesting finding is that Konak Pier as a social space for couples not only at weekends but also on weekdays. Several uses and variety in goods and activities attract this group. Although the location of Konak Pier is more accessible to visit by all, this issue does not appear significantly different for all users. Especially young people and couples who are from higher income groups prefer to use this place, particularly cinemas, cafes, bars, and restaurants. Konak Pier has different characteristics than recent common malls. In Konak Pier there are no benches or rest areas to sit and watch the environment in comparison to other malls where several sitting areas are available. The user's time allocated to rest has to be spent within cafés and restaurants and the architecture implicitly pushes the user to consumption. Therefore, Konak Pier is a controlled space where the aim is, as Lofland (2000) says, "to control not only physical layout and physical content and decor, but also who can be present doing what". Commodification of public space and control of access, as in the case of Konak Pier has resulted in the reduction or elimination of socially significant functions.

IV. CONCLUSION

Regeneration projects increase attraction for investment and carry the risk of transforming “regenerated” places into commodities that can be sold and bought (Lofland, 2000). If a public space is the subject of a regeneration project, the major aim in our opinion should be to provide a balance between public and private interests. The two projects we have examined in this paper constitute opposing results obtained in regeneration processes on urban sites that are a couple of hundred meters apart from each other in the same city.

Konak Square is an image-led regeneration project defined by a touristic vision for Izmir. The square is not transformed into a commodity, because the project was carried out by the municipality, and the private sector was kept out of the process. Konak Square still survives as a public space where different social groups and classes come together.

On the contrary, transformation of Konak Pier is based on a market-led vision that aims to maximize profit. Hence the building was reconstructed to provide for shopping and other leisure activities that increase profit. Accessibility is limited to higher income groups causing the building to lose its publicness and to become a completely privatized space especially because of the user profile the mall addresses.

Both Konak Square and Konak Pier transformation projects are presented as elements of a whole historical revitalization project in Trade-Tourism Vision of Izmir; however, these projects cannot be considered as part of the same vision that puts public interests over private interests.

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