

ROLE OF URBAN PROJECTS AS A TOOL IN URBAN INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION

Recently, particularly in metropolitan cities we are witnessing a fast change through implementation of mega projects. On the one hand, physical formation of cities are going through a change, on the other, new behaviour patterns and consumer moulds are emerging. All these are able to define two different structures which characterise both integration and disintegration between the locals. In this paper, the aim is to discuss the role of urban projects as a political tool as part of this paradoxical process. Therefore, current urban projects in Istanbul's agenda will be referred to as examples and integration and disintegration concepts will be discussed with reference to the urban space.

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Introduction

Recently, particularly in metropolitan cities we are witnessing a fast change through implementation of mega projects. The fact that local governments resort to urban projects in compliance with their political approach and that these implementations are realised mostly on public spaces bring up different arguments and problems to the agenda.

- The possibility of using urban projects as a tool in the realisation of a political scenario,
- The social and physical disintegration that can be created as a result of urban development through projects unrelated to one another,
- Acknowledging the built environment created by these projects and their representation forms on space as communication tools,
- The fact that type projects applied in any place can contain an approach which considers the "area" it is located on independent of context,
- The possibility of public areas turning into commercial, theatrical show grounds.

The Changing Structure of Urban Space

The idea that cities can have a form is a concept of the neoclassical urban design approach that considered building blocks architectural elements. However, it is impossible to speak of a single form for today's cities. Now, cities on a global scale are in an increasing competition for investors, consumers and activities. Thus, the process has led to variations in the cities' external aspect formed by massive projects. Cultural forms have been commoditised. The traditional meanings of culture have been eviscerated, copied and added to the form repertoire. The changing structure of this multi-fragmented and elaborate urban space created urban polarisations. This process that caused increasing fragmentation and disintegration inevitably led to debates on urban projects as tools.

On The Terminology of "Urban Projects"

In cities dominated by the capitalist system each entrepreneur, even public authority, viewed the city from his own perspective thus perceiving planning as a technical process with no subject. Yet, today's dominant planning approach is based on a sustainability understanding with a broader horizon comprising welfare provision, socially just, environmentally friendly and democratic decision producing characteristics. Here, space is considered as a multi-dimensional social phenomenon which is produced, consumed and accumulated. A wide

scope understanding of planning regarded as one that transcends traditional planning approaches limited by physical space and considers all the characteristics pertaining to “place” as one that is controlled and orchestrated as a whole is thus reached (Sökmen, 2003). Within the scope of this approach, “urban projects” to solve the problems in particular urban areas without severing its relation with the planning process comes to the agenda as a political choice. We see that efforts to redefine the relation between architecture and urbanism rather than the more formal and technical approaches constitute the first step in ideas put forth on urban projects. In these new formulations, the role of technicians taking part in the process is shared by the inhabitants and other actors (Mangin, Panerai, 1999). Thus, a group consisting of various subjects rather than a single one may be effective in the process. And there may be new techniques and conceptual instruments in the theoretical background of urban projects. The common denominator of the different approaches and areas of specialization is the reaction felt towards the rigid planning conditions. We are witnessing a passage from standard approaches to non-standard ones, from modernist approaches to nature friendly ones with new paradigms, new organisational forms and new areas of knowledge. The complex system characteristic of the city dictates the question of how to manage this complexity¹.

“Urban projects” usually focus on urban areas which have been disintegrated by the industrial city and lost their function under present day circumstances. Urban projects come up in numerous areas from the recovery of former industrial and port areas no longer used, to technoparks requiring new and technological infrastructure and are needed by international capital, amusement parks, the creation of new residential areas or creating new value by the gentrification of former city centre residential areas. If urban projects that are extremely important in increasing the quality of life and space are not handled with utmost sensitivity, they may create potential areas for new problems. Projects prepared disregarding the interrelation between self-enclosed urban areas and their effects and contributions to urban life can become sources of new problems for the city. Therefore, it is very important to discuss urban projects from the theoretical as well as the implementation aspect.

The Relation of Urban Projects and Urban Transformation

The sites subject to urban projects can be of “public” or “private” character. Although these may look like totally different areas from the aspect of status, ownership and use, they are in close interaction with one another. Speaking of the existence of one is only possible through the relation it has built with the other. Therefore, even if the intervention forms to be implemented in these two sites are taken up individually, they have the power of transforming each other in the city. Thus, urban projects whose object is public and private sites can also initiate an urban transformation process. Therefore, urban projects must not be reduced to solely the physical space but must be taken up with the social components of the area.

It is observed that the concept of urban transformation as the term is used today emerges as a large scope restructuring approach towards overcoming the socio-economic and spatial wreckage caused in cities by the problems of the post-industrial development phase and particularly the dynamics of the post-fordist period (Sökmen, 2003).

The important aspect here is the kind of planning understanding and of urban project approach used to build the concept of urban transformation. It is impossible to speak of successful urban transformation as long as it does not comprise the multilateral decision making mechanisms and wide scope sustainability dimension. In such a case, urban projects would become an instrument widely used by urban entrepreneurialism for the creation of resources. And likewise, it would not go beyond becoming a show ground as a result of the commercialisation, exaggeration and jollification of the public space.

The Relation of Urban Projects to Urban Integration and Disintegration

As public and private spaces each part exists in an effort to integrate to the whole with its own social and physical formation and transformation. The ontologic link between the parts and the whole that they form requires that they be handled not only as geographical disintegrations but through the disintegration in the community, space and time in the social organisation (Çınar, Çizmeçi, 2003). In this process, the city image can be dealt with in its own entirety as the "figure" in diversified relations with the "environment". The urban figure lives and grows in an organised manner. It has a certain order and a mutual structural dependence both in the functional and symbolic sense is created among its parts (Mazzoleni, 1996).

Exploring the Example of the Istanbul Kartal Sub-Centre, Kartal-Pendik Seafront Urban Transformation Project within the Scope of Urban Integration and Disintegration

The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Planning and Urban Design Centre which has no official status was formed within the body of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and for some time, this centre has been working on the 1/100.000 scale strategic plan of Istanbul. According to this plan, which has not been approved yet, the central load of Istanbul is divided between three centres. Kartal at the east and Küçükçekmece at the west are being added to the old Eminönü-Taksim centre. Bids have been opened with six world famous architects for the two new centres.

Expectations regarding the whole of the metropolitan area are explained as follows in the design briefs given to the three architects invited to the bid for the Kartal Sub-Centre, Kartal-Pendik Seafront Urban Transformation Project:

The aim of this project is to overcome the monocentric (Eminönü, Beyoğlu, Ayazağa, Büyükdere axis) structure of the metropolis and solve the unbalanced distribution of the employment-dwelling relations on the Anatolian and European sides.

The fact that new attraction centres specialised in the service sector have not been developed on the Anatolian side of the city is causing employment pressure concentrated on the European side and the metropolis to go through an unhealthy growth phase. This situation keeps bridge crossing proposals on the agenda at all times and is also the basic reason of the uncontrolled and illegal urban developments that are damaging the natural environment along the highways.

The vacated industrial sites in the Kartal area which can accommodate a population of 2 million and can create an employment capacity of 100,000 are going into this transformation process. Kartal's potential as a centre presents an important opportunity in overcoming the mono-centre issue dealt with above and which constitutes the basis of numerous adverse conditions. Thus, the aim is to start the process of the development of service areas which will not only serve the metropolitan area in general with effective waterway, metro and Marmaray connections but also will strengthen Istanbul's market relations with its area and the country in general.

The fact that a large portion of the area is public property is an important factor in the applicability of the project. Drawing a lesson from similar experience in the Ayazağa-Büyükdere area, instead of highrises built on lots with divided ownership, do not contribute space quality and to the environment and is unable to establish a connection with people, the aim of this project is to design an easily accesible metropolitan area of aesthetic value, with well planned cultural and public spaces, and where squares and pedestrian ways come to the fore.

Kisho Kurokawa, one of the three architects determined for the Kartal project, is one of the leading names of the Metabolist trend known for its urban visions since the 1970s. Massimiliano Fuksas is known for his urban transformation projects in Europe and the Far East. Zaha Hadid, one of the most brilliant names of contemporary architecture who is famous for having effaced the boundaries between architecture and art, is challenging the limits of design, carrying her “artificial landscape” approach to higher scales with the powerful urban silhouette and panorama. Kurokawa’s project for Kartal is interpreted as one with an axis, focus, a modern approach in which the classical urban structure treated skillfully, Fuksas’s project as one with a dynamic formation planning approach which rejects classical instruments except functional zoning, and Hadid’s project as one exploring the typologies that form urban topography through a fluid grid system (Balamir, 2006). On 29 March 2006 an international jury (4 Turkish, 3 foreign members) selected Zaha Hadid’s project for the Kartal area. The project is expected to start at the end of the year and to be completed in 15 years.

Firstly, it was the reaction of the architectural community that formed the main axis of the debates of the public on this issue. The fact that Turkish architects were not invited to the project tender has been interpreted as the lack of confidence of the local government in its own architects. On the other hand, there have also been some positive reactions claiming that getting service for urban projects in this manner is a step in the right direction, emphasizing that team work is essential for quality design, and that although design is universal, local knowledge and prevision is crucial in solutions to be developed in planning.

The points emphasized in comments regarding the project of Zaha Hadid, the author of the selected Kartal Sub-Center, Kartal-Pendik Seafront Urban Transformation Project are (Gümüş, 2006):

- *That Hadid attempts to open the functionalist architectural approach to discussion and that therefore, her project is not one of creating an urban form but rather a tool for discussion,*
- *That the project’s visible images are perceived by the urban government as a “manner of construction” rather than “architectural metaphors”,*
- *That metaphors are not a construction tool, but a tool for exploration, and that contemporary architecture uses this kind of images not to give information about construction but to deconstruct by querying urban processes,*
- *That the blocks with cruciform plans developed based on the grid plan and the public circulation areas have a complex organisation, and that the settlement itself consists of a single flexible network just like a natural organism,*
- *The extent to which the plans prepared for this transformation have been queried and the extent of our awareness of the impact of these scenarios on the future of the city,*
- *The manner in which professionals and representatives of the public are involved in the decision making process.*

The view that the location choice and problem spots determined for both centres proposed (Kartal, Küçükçekmece) were consistent as well as the fact that such an undertaking by the local government was of importance from the standpoint of urban and planning history was shared at various platforms formed with the participation of scholars, architects, urban planners, etc.²

Within the scope of this paper where the role of urban projects as a tool in urban integration and disintegration are explored, following an evaluation of the process of the Kartal Urban Transformation Project taken up as an example, the role of this urban project in urban integration and disintegration is questioned.

Located 50 km away from the existing centre, the stone quarries and the industrial areas which are no longer functional in Kartal, Istanbul, have an urban transformation area quality. Today, the site appears to be an industrial area. The location of the site within the metropolitan area gives it an articulation quality. The articulation is between the inner city and the outer city. Those living in the inner city pertain to the middle and upper middle income groups and their population growth rate is lower than those of the outer city. Those living in the outer city pertain to the lower and lower middle income groups and the population growth rate here is higher than in the inner city (Güvenç, 2006)³.

Here the inner city is defined as the area between the E5 highway and the seafront area and the outer city as the area north of the E5 established after the 1960s and known as the industrial corridor consisting of industrial buildings and the dwellings – mostly illegal constructions - of those who work in the area.

The fact that this transformation area is located at a point directly on the Marmaray (the rehabilitated suburban system project between Gebze and Halkalı) and Kadıköy-Kartal Light Railway System project and can also connect to sea transportation also adds to its articulation aspect. The Sabiha Gökçen Airport located very close to the transformation area together with the Ümraniye-Üsküdar Light Railway System project planned to pass from the north further increase the opportunities of the area's integration with the whole of the metropolitan area.

The coastal ecology of the area cannot be undermined. Land use that will maximise ecological totality and optimal spatial arrangements of eco systems have to be considered in urban integrations. At the same time, the basic human requirements can only be met in a rational way providing they are met within the scope of a sustainable environment approach. What is important here is to find the right arrangement (Forman, 1995).

In the light of the above evaluations, if we read the urban project selected for the transformation area as an urban exploration project within the context of an opinion project rather than a construction instrument, it can be said that it creates opportunities for urban integration.

When the soft gridal⁴ system proposed by the author of the project for the transformation area is not perceived just from its form aspect but as containing an integrating aspect for different social fabrics we can talk about urban integration. What is meant by form aspect here is for example the integration that is assumed to be created as a result of the ends of the proposed grid connecting to the existing transportation channels of the city.

The fact that the grid system has been used throughout history shows that this pattern which looks rigid in form has in fact a flexible and neutral structure. Hippodamus of Miletus is known to be the first urban constructor to have considered the grid as an expression of the culture. According to him, the grid expressed the logic of civilised life. In the history of western urbanism, the grid has been used while making a start in a new location or in rebuilding places where it existed but was ruined as a result of some disaster. Like all other designs, the grid, too, can be transformed to the thing symbolized by the grid in certain communities. In modern times, the grid has been used as a plan neutralizing the environment (Sennett, 1999).

As a result, urban projects have a serious role in urban integration and/or disintegration especially in metropolitan areas. If we want to achieve urban integration, just as we need to create variety in unisolated public areas for common use, we also have to consider them as a vital part of the urban fabric. Urban projects will have positive contributions to the metropolis if they do not remain within a limited project designing understanding, have a long

term development vision put forth by wide scope planning behind the logic of transformation, have a function relating to urban development behind pretentious presentations, are not considered as an area of consumption that has powerful attraction and high political returns.

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¹ The "KOL/MAC Project Muten Istanbul May 30 – July 22, 2006" exhibition that handles this as a problematic and presents an alternative approach for the urban area known as the Galataport project in Istanbul opened its doors at the Garanti Gallery. The basic approach explanation in the exhibition catalog was: *Project MUTEN Istanbul is an urban design proposal for the Galataport site based on network intelligence and strategies derived from "Proto MUTEN Istanbul Workshops". This naturalized urban design approach generates relational spatiotemporal models registering and creating otherwise elusive vital interconnections between such divergent categories as geology and sociology, oceanography and biography, vegetation and transportation, nature and culture.*

² Günkut Akın, Emre Arolat, Aydan Balamir, İhsan Bilgin, Can Çinici, Murat Güvenç, Tansel Korkmaz, Mehmet Küçükdoğu, Arif Suyabatmaz, Atilla Yücel participated in the panel organized on 29 April 2006 by İhsan Bilgin, head of the Bilgi University Architectural Design Post Graduate Program.

³ Interpreted using the explanations in the presentation by Murat Güvenç during the above mentioned panel discussion.

⁴ This expression belongs to the author of the project. In the above mentioned panel the gridal system has been referred to using expressions such as "cloud like fabrics", "a single netflexible like a natural organism", "a net that fills in the two sides".