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Notes from the Anthesis of a Super Ville:  
**Influence of Digital Paradigm  
on Istanbul's Architectural Context**

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## **Notes from the Anthesis of a Super Ville: Influence of Digital Paradigm on Istanbul's Architectural Context**

Word superville is used to indicate the integration of a city with the market, servicing utilities and media on a global scale through digital technology. Another term that is associated with the same meaning is information city (or global city). However the term superville addresses a dual structure of connotations which on one side refers to urban relations in global scale and on the other to a body of urban formations smaller than a town (the villes) that come together to form a more complex unity. Trying to integrate itself into the global financial and informational network, the term superville denotes a bit from both associations in Istanbul's case.

The driving forces of the continuous tide of change in architectural arena seem to be closely linked with the digital paradigm, borders of which is drawn by informational technology in today's world. The latest advances in informational technology have shaped a new set of relations both in terms of finance and cultural products. Architecture being the largest domain of culture and having inseparable bonds with finance, has to adjust itself to this new context of relations. Istanbul and cities alike have to fit into this adjustment while trying to solve problems which are rooted in analogue architectural and urban paradigm.

This paper aims to give a retrospective image of the changing character of architectural and urban developments in Istanbul within the past three decades. During this period of time, the capital poured into architectural and urban practice by the limited governmental resources has been replaced by international private sector funds on a global scale. The requirements of international capital on the basis of physical environment had a significant effect on architectural and urban configuration of Istanbul. High rise commercial axes started to emerge. This changing scale of financial amplitude also affected the urban markets. The real estate sales funded liquidity problem in the finance sector which led to a huge supply in housing estates threatening the northern natural reserve areas of the city. The informational technology also had its effect on urban and architectural context of Istanbul. The building 'prototypes' marketed worldwide started to appear one after another in different corners of the city. Shopping malls are designed cooperatively with international architectural firms through the informational networks. The services provided by leading international architectural firms are dispersed into that of small to medium scaled architectural companies. Thus, such architectural companies are inevitably located as the main decision makers. The reading of Istanbul's architectural context from such a point of view and taking some notes will make it possible to understand the general characteristics of the problems awaiting the cities (supervilles) that stand on the starting point of their journey to become information cities.

## Introduction

Istanbul's integration with the global city network led to changes in its urban morphology in macro scale. Examined in a historical perspective, Istanbul can be observed to be an integral part of global city network, and being situated on the main trading routes, has been influenced by global financial flow until the fall of the Ottoman Empire towards the end of the 19th century. This condition of the city of Istanbul can be read through the urban artifacts such as significant administrative buildings, structures of defense, religious and commercial buildings. After the WW1, because of the change in the political and economic context of the world, Istanbul lost its significance in the global network of cities. It was not until the advance in the informational technologies and the consequent events that led the political polarization of the global conjuncture to resolve in the 80's that Istanbul had to follow an urban development pattern with a limited amount of financial accumulation. The fragmentation in the urban form is characteristic to this era as well.

The digital paradigm changed the production relations in the societies almost everywhere in the world as well as Istanbul. The informational transactions provided by the services of transnational companies created a network among the cities that hosted those companies making them part of a borderless unity we call information cities. Information cities, also known as global cities, require certain aspects to be fulfilled in order to increase their connectivity within this global network of informational flow and attract foreign investments. They have been associated in a serious competition which generated buildings and urban functions that connote power, wealth and extravaganza. Starting from the 80's and gaining velocity after the 90's, Istanbul has become a part of the informational cities network. The urban and architectural reflection of this process includes the construction of large scaled buildings and urban development projects that aim to attract the foreign investment. It is also a consequence of this globalization process of Istanbul that it has shown an accelerating urban expansion after the 90's. Being a part of the global city network, Istanbul has also been exposed to the effects of globalization through means of both capital and information flow, and after the 1980's, got influenced by the real property oriented urban transformation processes that took place around the world. The horizontal development observed in the city up to 1980s turned into vertical development after this period. This paper aims to give an outline of Istanbul's expansion pattern and the characteristics of the urban development projects that has taken place within this integration process of Istanbul to the information city network.

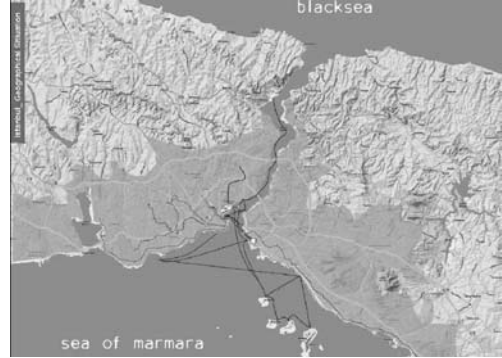
### **Istanbul's situation in the network of information cities:**

#### **Connectivity, Foreign Direct Investments and Urban Expansion**

Istanbul is situated on the coast of marmara and black sea and it separates Europe from Asia by the strait called Bosphorus. Istanbul displays a linear development pattern along the east-west axis. The north of the city is uninhabited and is covered with forests that contain water reserves of the city. The topography on the northern section of the city is defined by a sequence of mountains that are the extensions of the northern tourus mountain system. Two main highways

**Figure 1**

Geographical situation of Istanbul, and its transportation network



define the transportation network. One is D100 the formerly built highway network of Istanbul and the other is E80 which is a part of TEM the Trans-European Motorway. The city has developed in between the connection roads of D100 and E80, and the coastal roads that surrounds the city on both continents and alongside the golden horn (Figure 1).

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To understand the urbanization of transnational capital and informational flow, we may need to have some idea about the term global connectivity of a city which is derived from inter-city relations on a global scale. The term 'world city network' builds up on Sassen's treatment of advanced producer service firms as producers of 'global cities'. Major global service firms operate through numerous offices in cities across the world to provide a 'seamless' service for their clients. Through this practice they create a network of global service centres that we term the world city network. (Taylor, Catalano and Walker, 2002: p 2368) The map in Figure 4 shows the linkage rates that Istanbul develops with other world cities. According to this atlas of connectivities, Istanbul seems to produce linkages with cities like Athens, Sofia, Brussels, Warsaw, Prague, Johannesburg, Kiew, Moscow, Helsinki, Beijing, and Shanghai more than other world cities. Istanbul holds the 42nd place among 50 cities with the highest conectivity values in the world city network. It indicates how serviceable Istanbul is within the transnational system of service providing companies. Istanbul can provide slightly more than 40% of the connections made by London that shares the top five rank with New York, Hong Kong, Paris and Tokyo (Cadirci, H.,2006: p. 135) Conectivity value of a city is also an indicator of the volume of transnational capital a city involves with.

Foreign direct investment

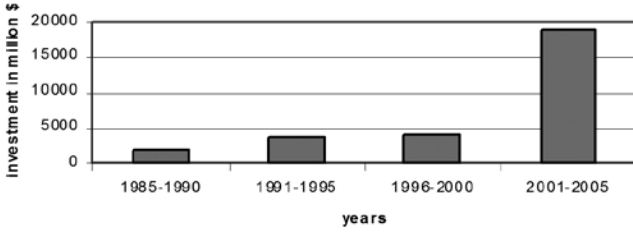


Figure 2  
Foreign Direct Investments in Turkey [2]

Loss in Land Categories

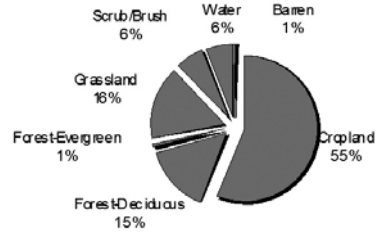


Figure 3  
Loss in Land Use Categories

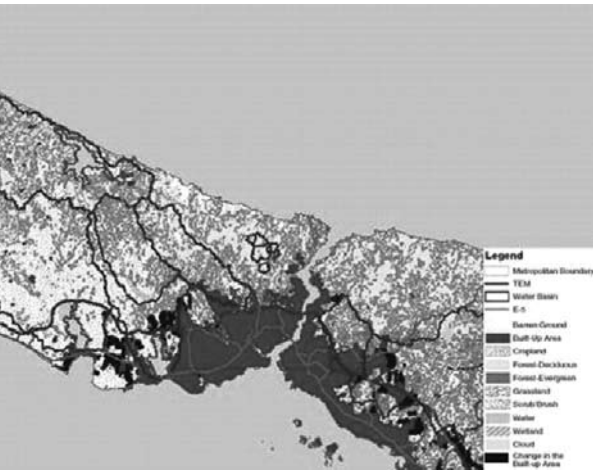


Figure 4  
Urban Expansion (Geymen, A., Baz, I., 2008: p. 452)

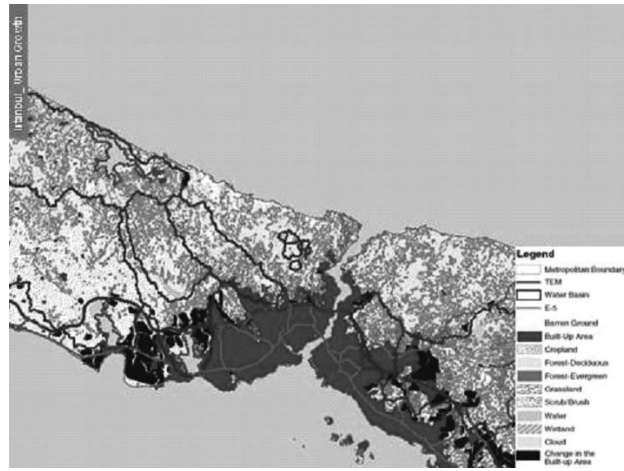


Figure 6  
Urban Expansion and Cropland Decrease in the next 15 years

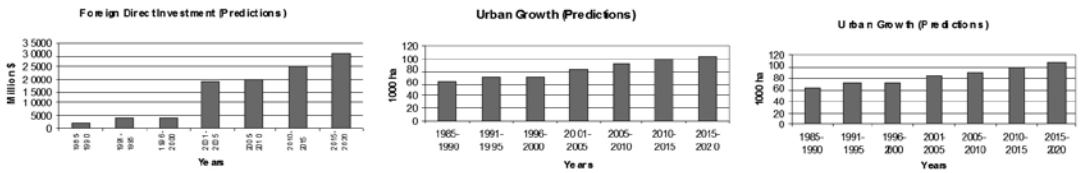


Figure 5  
Predictions: increase in FDI, urban growth and cropland decrease

Figure 2 shows the Foreign Direct Investments in million dollars throughout the years and the significant increase after year 2000. The transnational capital flow is concentrated in the western regions of Turkey. Istanbul and its neighboring cities attract nearly one third of all the foreign investments. (Berköz, L., Türk, S., S., 2007: p. 63)

After examining the investment values, the urban expansion data provided by Geymen and Baz who have derived it by working on satellite images have been analyzed, If the urban growth data over the 15 years is analyzed, one can observe a 2.5% of increase per year in the total built up area in Istanbul. The Decrease in cropland area is 0.84% percent per year. The decrease in total forest area is 0,75% per year. (Geymen, A., Baz, I., 2008: p. 452) First let's take a look at how the increase and decrease in land categories in the last 15 years have occurred. Of all the increase in the built up area is consumed from all the other land categories. If we project those data as percentages on a graph we will see the highest amount of area is consumed from the cropland area (Figure 3)

In the land use analysis provided by Geymen and Baz in Figure 4, the built-up area is marked in red and increase in the built up area in 15 years is marked in black. And if we keep on observing the same analysis we can see the urban expansion taking place through the cropland areas starting from the transportation network of the city. The cropland on this map is marked by brown dots on white background. This is mainly because the expansion follows the easiest way possible. Instead of going into north, where the topography is defined by high mountains, the expansion seems to choose the cropland areas which has a comparatively moderate topography.

We can use linear regression to predict the foreign direct investment amounts, urban growth, and the cropland decrease in the next 15 years (Figure 5) and we can project it on the map and what we would see in the future would look like as shown in Figure 6.

### **Regeneration of Urban Form**

The requirements of international capital on the basis of physical environment had a significant effect on architectural and urban configuration of Istanbul. High rise commercial axes started to emerge. This changing scale of financial amplitude also affected the urban markets. The real estate sales funded liquidity problem in the finance sector which led to a huge supply in housing estates threatening the northern natural reserve areas of the city. The informational technology also had its effect on urban and architectural context of Istanbul. The building 'prototypes' marketed worldwide started to appear one after another in different corners of the city. Shopping malls are designed cooperatively with international architectural firms through the informational networks. The services provided by leading international architectural firms are dispersed into that of small to medium scaled architectural companies. Thus, such architectural companies are inevitably located as the main decision makers. Projects that started to reshape the urban form can be grouped into five among which include the projects that aim the decentralization of Istanbul; the renewal projects initiated by the metropolitan municipality, cultural projects, residences and gated communities, and the creation of central commercial areas.

### **Decentralization of Istanbul**

The metropolitan planning bureau of Istanbul municipality had announced international design competitions for two development areas in Istanbul and invited architects from around the world in 2005. Those projects were proposed for Kucukcekmece on the western and for Kartal on the eastern end of the urban area. Zaha Hadid architects won the competition for Kartal Regeneration area and the aims of the project can be listed as follows:

- To minimize the imbalance between Eastern and Western sides of Istanbul in terms of service sector,
- To create a new central business district and an urban centre for eastern side,
- To encourage the transformation of existing industrial establishment into new technology or decentralize them,
- To establish different functions like commercial, tourism, administration and housing and strengthening the transport connections of this new centre with the rest of the city.

Aims of Ken Yeang's winner up proposal for Küçükçekmece regeneration area is as follows:

- To create a recreational center which will serve the entire metropolitan area of Istanbul, by considering the historical and natural values of the site
- To establish recreational and cultural facilities and new housing opportunities for people in order to raise the life standards in the neighborhood.
- To strengthen the connection of the sea with the lake and improving the ecological conditions of the coastal areas.
- To establish different functions like commercial, tourism, administration and housing and strengthening the transport connections of this new centre with the rest of the city (Özkan, S. , 2007)

### **Renewal projects initiated by the metropolitan municipality:**

#### **Süleymaniye, Fener-Balat, Slukule, and Tarlabasi.**

Istanbul metropolitan municipality have initiated projects for the renewal of slum areas or ghettos of the city. There are for main projects to be considered under this headline: Projects developed for Süleymaniye, Fener-Balat-Ayvansaray, Sulukule and Tarlabasi.

#### **Süleymaniye Renewal Project**

The Süleymaniye renewal project that encompasses Küçükpazar, Vezneciler, Vefa and Süleymaniye is a giant and ambitious gentrification project, consisting of building 300 commercial centers with shops and 1700 residential buildings. The buildings in Süleymaniye, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Istanbul, will be bought by K PTA , a corporation known to support the present political party in the lead for a standardized price that K PTA itself will determine. While the standardized prices will not reflect the real value of the estates, the inhabitants will be offered new apartments at the northern settlements of the city that they can own by paying a difference over the selling price of their former homes. The dwellers of the region who are pres-



**Figure 7**  
Zaha Hadid's proposal for Kartal  
Regeneration Area



**Figure 8**  
Ken Yeang's proposal for Küçükçekmece Regeneration Area



**Figure 9**  
Some of the regeneration projects in Istanbul

ently very poor are generally tenants who will run into difficulty paying their debts. With the completion of the project 10000 people will be forced to leave the area and replaced by people from higher income profiles. (Morgül, T., 2007)

### **Fener-Balat-Ayvansaray Rehabilitation Project**

The Fener-Balat project which is a joint project of the Fatih Municipality and the EU, originally targeted the participation and inclusion of the dwellers of the region into the project through various activities and had underlined the necessary precautions to avoid the changing ownership of the buildings in the region. However, with the initialization of the project, real estate prices faced a rapid increase in the area causing a change in the ownership structure. The original

inhabitants of the Balat region mainly consisted of immigrants who had been forced to leave their land, and now once again they face with the same problem as buildings hastily changed their ownership. The rehabilitation project, which was targeted to be finalized in 2007, in terms of timeline has reached its goal, both 'social rehabilitation' and the criteria of 'inhabitants inclusion in the project' have been abandoned on the way (Morgül, T., 2007).

### **Sulukule Renewal Project**

Sulukule's residents are mainly Roman Gypsies who are marginalized from the society that work in temporary if not marginalized jobs and are economically very vulnerable and unprotected. The municipality of Fatih, with the announcement of the law 5366 (the Urban Renewal law), started working on the redevelopment and structuring of historical buildings in the Sulukule area. The 'improvement project' supported by the government can said to harm the music culture Roman Gypsies of Sulukule have developed for 500 hundred years. Academics and nongovernmental human rights and cultural preservation organizations acclaim the reconsidering of the project from perspective of tangible heritage (Morgül, T., 2007).

### **Gentrification Project of Tarlabası**

The 'gentrification' of Tarlabası was first put into the spotlight with the announcement of law 5366 in 2005. One of the building blocks of the so-called improvement project consists of the obligatory restoration of buildings by their owners, for which they are offered bank credits and project supports. The building owners, who resist taking part in the restoration project, will be forced by expropriations and these estates will be restored by TOK (The Mass Housing Bureau of Turkey) and KPTA. The inhabitants of this area who mostly consist of an aggrieved population of forced immigrants will be moved once again. The 'improvement' project of Tarlabası, which is carried out through expropriation and changing ownerships is seen as a remedy for the security problems of Beyoğlu. However, it is important to underline that the real profiteers will be Çalık Holding and Polat Holding which are investing in this area (Morgül, T., 2007).

### **Cultural Projects: Convention Valley and the Haliç Shipyards**

The area consisting of Harbiye, Maçka, and Taksim will acquire a new name; the Convention Valley. The driving force behind this change is the activities that will take place in 2009 for the IMF directors and the goal set for 2010 when İstanbul will become the Cultural Capital of Europe. The AKM, Atatürk Cultural Center and the Muhsin Ertuğrul Auditorium, two main sites for Performing Arts, will be demolished and bigger buildings will take their place while the Harbiye Open Air Auditorium will be covered. This project which has been pioneered by the Foundation of Tourism Agencies and costs 27 million YTL was accepted by the government. The convention valley projects intends to attract about two million people; shoppers and travelers, with its many shopping sites and hotels for temporary accommodation (Morgül, T., 2007).

The decision to remove military shipyards, Taşkızak, Camialtı and civil Haliç was taken in 1997 and the actual process began right after the earthquake in 1999. The municipality was going to turn the region into a 'Valley of Culture'. The navy had established a deal with the municipality,



**Figure 10**  
Fener-Balat, Ayvansaray Rehabilitation Project [3]



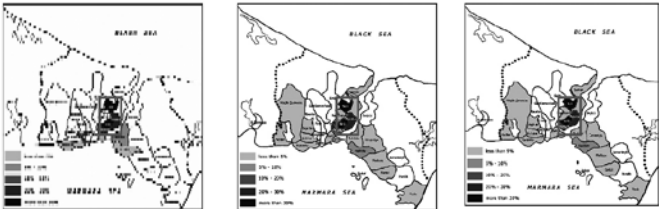
**Figure 11**  
Sulukule as it is today [4]



**Figure 12**  
Convention Valley [5]



**Figure 13**  
Haliç Shipyards [6]



**Figure 14**  
Distribution of Service Firms  
(Özdemir, D., 2002: pp. 255-257)

requesting to build 80 buildings on the Island of Heybeliada and in Gölcük in exchange for the removal of the shipyards. As a consequence the shipyard workers were forced into retirement or were abruptly fired. The total budget allocated by the municipality for the project is 200 million YTL. The possibility of turning the region into parks or training facilities for the police force or university facilities seems likely (Morgül, T., 2007).

### **Residences and Gated Communities and Central Commercial Axis**

The formations that particularly affect the urban macroform and the physical environment are the gated communities that emerge at the peripheral regions of the city and the residences that rise up at the city center. The İli Maslak corridor besides being a central commercial axis is met with multi purpose buildings that accommodate functions like residences, and shopping centers. The height regulations have been reconsidered and high rise residence buildings intended to serve high income groups have been allocated on the hills of Bosphorus changing the silhouette of the city entirely. The multi star hotel buildings that used to be located only on the European side of Istanbul have started to emerge on the Asian side as well due to the commercial dynamism of this side. Asian side that used to be a resort area of Istanbul not until earlier than 40 years has today acquired centers of dwelling, commerce and work. The peripheral regions of the city started to house gated communities, which were once accepted as the ghettos of the city now turned to be the most prestigious areas that accommodate people from higher income groups. The distribution of services in Istanbul show that they are concentrated on the İli Maslak corridor which has become the new central business axis starting from the 90's (Özdemir, D., 2002: pp. 255-257).

### **Conclusions**

If we take a look at how the city will tend to expand in the future, we can say that on İli Maslak corridor a vertical expansion can be expected. To the east and west extends of the city, the expansion will tend to follow the path through the cropland areas where the topography is more plain and the transportation routes and seems to have a spread out character. So the city has to take account its coarse character of topography which is an advantage to stop the city expansion towards the natural resources vital for the city. The topographical character of the city is at the same time a disadvantage for it will force the city to grow into the cropland areas

The spread out character of the expansion at the west and east ends of the city has to be controlled by proposing new urban centers to those areas. But it is also important to balance the growth of those centers for they will attract more population. Lastly it is important to meet İli Maslak axis with appropriate public functions for it tends to become a stronger center for the city. The existing public use and the open area design is very insufficient and this axis should also be supported with public functions to prevent it become criminal areas at night.

The city of Istanbul that has shown an expansion of approximately 150km long in the east-west axis, after the consumption of cropland areas can be expected to grow towards the north direction into the shores of the Blacksea. Such an expansion has to be taken under control for the

water and green reserve areas are located in this direction. Istanbul for reasons that it has been an historical industrial settlement has always attracted population and transnational capital and has been a scene of unconventional urban expansion. In this context the existing unqualified physical urban texture through transformational projects is being attempted to turn into new developmental areas. On the other hand, the concentration in the city center is being increased to get maximum amount of benefit out of it. As a brief critique of this situation it can be said that the short income inhabitants that are pulled into the city center are being pushed away by the enforcement of the transnational capital.

The driving forces of the continuous tide of change in architectural arena seem to be closely linked with the digital paradigm, borders of which is drawn by informational technology in today's world. The latest advances in informational technology have shaped a new set of relations both in terms of finance and cultural products. Architecture being the largest domain of culture and having inseparable bonds with finance, has to adjust itself to this new context of relations. Istanbul and cities alike have to fit into this adjustment while trying to solve problems which are rooted in analogue architectural and urban paradigm.

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