

# D o s s i e r   E d i t o r i a l

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## Istanbul as a palimpsest city and imperfection

Hülya TURGUT

*Maltepe University, Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul, TURKEY*

The first Istanbul Design Biennial with the theme of “Imperfection” took place between 13 October and 12 December, 2012. The theme of “Imperfection” was attempted to be read through Istanbul during the Biennial organised by IKSv. The expectation was for Istanbul to provide an inspiration for the design creation process with its far from being imperfect nature, fuzzy and temporary and yet exciting characteristics. The main theme of the Biennial that refers to the Japanese concept of “Wabi”, started out from the fact that design concepts are no longer fed by the utopias but by the quotidian in the transitory arising from impermanence<sup>1</sup>.

Within the context of the Academic Program of the Biennial, a series of events were jointly organised by “IAPS-CSBE Network-Culture and Space Network<sup>2</sup>” and the ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. Accordingly, throughout the biennial a number of intertwined activities such as paper selections, design workshops, student competitions, exhibitions and symposiums were held<sup>3</sup>. Within the scope of these activities, the main aim

<sup>1</sup><http://istanbultasarimbienali.iksv.org>

<sup>2</sup>Directed by Hülya Turgut and Peter Kellett, IAPS-CSBE Network is a scientific organisation taking place within IAPS “International Association for People-Environment Studies” aiming at defining the problems arising from the interaction between the culture and the space; seeking for solutions in an interdisciplinary framework after establishing a relation between theory and implementation; including these issues in the architectural education process along with theoretical and implementation studies in the overall context of built environment, design and planning issues. IAPS web page: <http://www.iaps-association.org>

<sup>3</sup>**Scientific Committee:** Orhan Hacıhasanoğlu, ITU, IAPS-CSBE Network Founding Member; Peter Kellett, Newcastle University, IAPS-CSBE Network Co-Coordinator; Handan Türkoğlu, ITU, IAPS-CSBE Network Founding Member; Hülya Turgut, ITU, IAPS-CSBE Network Co-Coordinator; Alper Ünlü, ITU, IAPS-CSBE Network Founding Member. **Organisation Committee:** Bihter Almaç, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture; F. Belgin Gümrü, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning; İpek Şen, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning; Önen Günöz, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture; Şebnem Şoher, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture.

was to analyse the “**Palimpsest**”<sup>4</sup> state of Istanbul and the discussion of concepts such as *spatial and social oppositions, change, transformation, continuity, urban and architectural identity, urban palimpsest* within a dialectic framework.

Undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students from different schools in Turkey participated in activities. They were expected to question the following issues: urbanisation, globalisation, localisation, effects of political and technological developments on society, economic structure and urban environments and its effects on the continuing transformations in Istanbul, the city in the context of changing dynamics and the new spatial patterns and the cultural interactions, and a multi-layered city that is Istanbul.

While the world is changing in terms of socio-cultural, physical, economic, political and technological dynamics, the cities appear as the main areas where these changes occur. It is possible to state that cities are formed of different contextual layers that are sometimes one on top of the other, sometimes side-by-side and sometimes intertwined forming its original characteristics; this formulation’s most fundamental and visible element is architecture. Furthermore it can be said that the mutual interaction of the dynamics is also rapidly altering the daily life as well as the cities themselves. These transformations are resulting in new urban spaces and spatial practices. In the on-going re-structuring and transformation process, the transformational relationship between the city and architecture takes a dramatic appearance. In this process, spaces that are produced and reproduced continually, creates a spatial layering and this time-space accumulation becomes a basic fact that needs to be explained in the process of the analysis of urban transformation. These layers while providing the city an authentic nature, are sometime segregated as being more important or less important; the view that the less important layers can be sacrificed for the safeguarding of the more important perceived layers, as well as the importance of filtering of the layers become very important at certain points in time. Within this context, the following concepts of “*urban palimpsest*”, “*palimpsest identity*” and “*palimpsest in architecture*” should be explicated.

Therefore the multi-layered identity of Istanbul which itself is undergoing a speedy economic, social and political transformation is inevitable. The concept of urban transformation has gained momentum with the passing of the urban transformation law last year. It is a phenomenon that aims to obtain a more “perfect” appearance in various parts of Istanbul. It has been occupying the national agenda since it is affecting the physical urban characteristics as well as the daily life routines. Istanbul is expected to become one of the global brand cities with a view of turning it into a source for economic prosperity by ridding it from the *decrepit* and turning it into a city with a *perfect* appearance. However, each new layer in the historical geography eliminates the physical existence of the previous one or exists by appending itself onto that previous layer. Today, the on-going transformation of Istanbul is brought about by removing the already existing and by

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<sup>4</sup>**Palimpsest:** *A manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing, but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form (Oxford Dictionary).*

replacing it with the requirements of the branding process namely –*the new, modern, intact, perfect.*

A paper competition<sup>5</sup> was organised as a part of the series of activities for students who had either finished their studies in the past five years or who were continuing their postgraduate or doctoral studies related to the **main theme** explained above. From the papers submitted to the **Third IAPS-CSBE Culture and Space Symposium** held on 27-28 November 2012, the academic committee chose five and this dossier was created.

**Çalak**, in her article entitled **Memory of Metropolis/Remembering and Forgetting in Metropolis** tries to define the concept of Metropolis through the interaction of space and time. She draws attention to a “dynamic palimpsest” structure arising from the fact that the metropolis is constantly changing and built through past order and relationships. In the metropolis, the world in which people live and their methods of interaction differ from the other cities. Detached from space, the individual’s customs of remembering and forgetting within the metropolitan life form is the focus of this article. The article furthermore tries to shed light on the topography of a metropolis that is inclined towards forgetting and carries references to ephemerality rather than stability and permanency. Furthermore, new suggestions on how Istanbul as a metropolis can be considered in the context of memory are also considered.

**Karaali and Karagöl**, in their paper entitled “**The Imperfection of the Incomplete Timeless Urban Space**” try to read the city Istanbul using a “*temporal folding*” method under the assumption that it is not possible to define cities purely on the basis of “present time”. Within the context of the paper, concepts such as *creative city, space as the body of time, hybrid space, palimpsest body, urban imperfection* are explicated. Furthermore, a stratified reading of the space is attempted while at the same time an attempt to understand the structure of the space-time relationship that is accruing through appending. Finally, it construes Istanbul as being not only a touristic stop but also as the dynamic living space of the dweller that is decayed, undefined, imperfect that is ingrained in the struggle between past and present.

**Taraz’s** paper entitled **Limits of Re-writing and Legibility of Transformations in Istanbul’s Historic Peninsula: An Interpretation Inspired from the Wabi-Sabi Philosophy** attempts to interpret the transformations undergone by the city throughout the history according to the concept of “palimpsest city” with the viewpoint of the Japanese Wabi-Sabi philosophy. The paper tries to read the city of Istanbul since its first urban settlements step by step while trying to show in the light of the Wabi-

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<sup>5</sup> **Scientific Committee/Jury:** **Semra Aydınli**, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture; **Nuran Zeren Gülersoy**, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning; **Orhan Hacıhasanoğlu**, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture; **Ahsen Özsoy**, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture; **Hülya Turgut**, ITU, Maltepe University, Faculty of Architecture, IAPS-CSBE Network Co-Coordinator; **Handan Türkoğlu**, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning; **Belkıs Uluoğlu**, ITU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture.

Sabi philosophy that the Historic Peninsula still possesses an ever-increasing beauty by virtue of life experiences and passing years despite all the imperfections affecting the course of the daily life.

In the paper entitled **An Urban Reading In-Between Past and Future: Palimpsest Identity** by **Avşar Karababa**, the city and urban identity concepts are explicated through the rhetorics of “*globalisation*” and “*brand city*”. The concept of “*palimpsest identity*” is analysed in particular in relation to Istanbul through how Istanbul is articulated to *brand city* rhetoric. The *brand city* rhetoric in addition to the globalisation rhetoric dissociates architecture, the city and its identity from the multi-dimensional and complex relations and defends the idea that they have purely an economic value. Within this paper’s content, the palimpsest identity of the region is attempted to be defined, starting with the fact that Palimpsest identity represents an urban structure that can be read as a course between past and future; focusing on Levent-Gültepe region that lies on Levent-Maslak axis to brand Istanbul as a “financial centre”. Furthermore, the “**palimpsest identity**” concept that could be considered as one of Istanbul’s possible identities, new ways of reading today’s architecture and city are sought with a different approach from the the dominant system’s perspective.

**Çanakçıoğlu**, in her paper entitled **Non-erasable Human Traces Against Urban Transformation**, demonstrates that within the scope of the urban transformation practices, the renovation works disregard the socio-cultural sustainability. Urban renewal movements that have not provided any benefit to the conveyance of cultural heritage is emphasized as an approach to attempt scraping off a life style as well as the physical evidence related to historical facts. In this paper, urban renewal will solely remain as a phenomena that would increase the unearned income in the city as long as it does not reach its essential social transformation aim and will provide no contribution to the main problems such as education, health and employment in the social lives of people living in the informal sector is discussed through an implemented case study on Sulukule (that is considered as a palimpsest city fragment).