

ISTANBUL HINGE CITY

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The text shows the reasons that have brought to the research and to the project proposed for my graduation thesis. The in-depth analyses of the actual trends of urban development in the modern global cities have led to recognize the importance to find more sustainable approaches against the depletion of the public open spaces. In the case of Istanbul, due to the acquisition of standardized urban models, the loss of a consistent aspect of the city's identity – represented by its informality – is leading to a strong social exclusion. The recognition of the informal settlements as a structural part of the today city's morphology is the key to design a new urban strategy that will enable an inclusive process of development for the whole community, along with the preservation of its features. The architectural project operates in the direction to establish the essential relations for the permanence of the menaced informality while supporting and improving the citizens life.

Keywords: Istanbul; Haliç; Hinge City; Gecekondu; Urban Regeneration

Introduction

Istanbul is the closer investigation field about the condition that many cities are experiencing in this century. The sudden and violent import of stereotyped housing patterns, inconsistent with the historical and urban stratification of Istanbul, and the ongoing speculative appropriation of the city by the private sector are leading to a rapid depletion of the public spaces and to an incontrovertible social exclusion. Once set for the variety and the coexistence of actors with different social background, these public places have now become object of a planning which exasperates the differences between citizens till a precise and programmed separation and induced expulsion of the low sectors of the population from the central and vital neighborhoods of the city. Moreover, the *standardisation* and the *commercialization* of the public space are depriving the city of the historical values that have permeated these places over the centuries. Whoever approaches to Istanbul today would find a city scrapped by the dizzying rhythms of its urbanization that promotes globalized patterns of consumption and estranges the inhabitants to whom these interventions are not addressed, in what appears to be a contradictory development process.

Istanbul

The rhythm of its constant urban sprawl contributes to put Istanbul among the world's *fast-growing cities*. There, the transformations implemented through specific macro-projects, whose main objective is to increase their international appeal and to reject - rather than solve - the critical social conditions owed to the aggravation of the disparities among the different sectors of the population,

are leading to brutal expulsions from the city centers of the weaker bands of citizens who have been forced to move in the cities' outskirts. *The socio-economic gap between the urban poor and the new global élites has converted the cityscape into an archipelago of enclave* (Korkmaz, Ünlü-Yücesoy, 2009) and this prevents the establishment of the inter-social relationships, which historically have set the basis for a homogeneous development of the whole communities.

The recent impressive expansion of Istanbul results in a territory described circumstantially by different phenomena that tend to overlap and to generate, eventually, a city without formal unity and full of contrasts. The main processes of the city's development occurred during the last century can be grouped in three phases: the informal settlements; the social mass housing; the macro-projects. Around the Fifties, the old Istanbul was overwhelmed by a violent informal edification, set in support of its late industrial development. The immigrant population had to solve the housing shortage issue and, in the lack of official provisions, came up with independent solutions. In few years, the shacks and the low-quality buildings of these informal settlements (the so called *gecekondu*, *built over night* in turkish) have soon saturated the city, stifling the historical center and altering completely the urban morphology of Istanbul. After this first phase, the central government stepped in for the first time in order to provide authorized affordable houses with the institution of TOKI (the organization put to direct the national residential planning). This has led to the edification of new districts of vertical mass housing in the city's outskirts, more similar to global peripheries, where it is impossible to find the strong informal interpersonal support network otherwise present in the *gecekondu*. Due to their by now central location and to the renewed economic value of the land they occupy, the consolidated *gecekondu* are nowadays threatened by the impact of the speculative macro-projects implemented by the private sector.

Hinge city

The critical discussion of this research has pointed out the importance that the public space still acquires, today more than ever, in historically urbanized realities with high rates of urban growth, where the ever increasing population menaces their social cohesion. The article set firstly its basis on the description that Richard Sennett gives about Istanbul. He calls it as a Hinge City, a particular urban form that has its prototype in the renaissance Venice. In history, both cities have based their wealth on good's trades and cultural exchanges made possible due to their location on important crossroads. In there, the multiple foreign communities – solely attracted by the city's commercial opportunities - were never truly included in the civic life, preferring informal open spaces for their small trades and self-determination. The informality of the liminal spaces is the main urban resource crucial for the survival of the individuals, due to the lack of the necessary means to ensure a homogeneous development of the whole citizenry and to the weak bonds between the foreign communities and the city.

The identity places of the *hinge city* are today object of social and political control actions entrusted to a top-down urban planning held by the private sector and the international companies of urban transformation. This results in a hyper definition of the public spaces that aims to provide the adequate places for a life conditioned by the global trends, with the consequent loss of the informality, de facto menacing the identity of the *hinge city* itself.

Haliç

Since the Byzantine times, this estuary hosted the port activities and soon became the main urban structure of the Ottoman Istanbul, along whose coasts were settled the Empire's very first industries. The city's development plan drawn by Henri Prost in 1936 marked the beginning of the area's decay: after the industrial boom of the Fifties, the hills on its surroundings were entirely covered by the first *gecekondu* of Istanbul. In the Eighties, the compromised natural balance and the bad sanitary conditions of the estuary brought to a remarkable process of urban redevelopment. After the relocation of the industries, Haliç is nowadays defined as an immense urban park which is part of the *Haliç Cultural Valley* program, which seeks to transform the area in a recreational district for citizens and tourists.

Haliç is the result of different processes operated by various actors (Bakbaşa, Töre, 2013) which tend to consolidate the intrinsic dualism of the estuary: on the southern coast, the public park creates a continuous and homogeneous system with the historical city; on the opposite coast, the university campuses and the private museums - along with the recently dismissed naval shipyards - act like enclosures that strengthen the concept of exclusivity of the open space and exacerbate the discontinuity and lack of connections between the near *gecekondu* and the estuary. Furthermore, in the hinterland, while the projects concerning the historical city confirm its cultural and touristic vocation, the huge informal settlement of *Okmeydanı* is object of a controversial urban regeneration project that increases the estrangement of the actual inhabitants through violent evictions, denying them the effects of the social and economic development of the area.

The project proposed takes into consideration both the actual conditions of the area and the directions that it will take after the development of the ongoing transformations. Focusing mainly on the more disadvantaged northern counterpart of Haliç, the proposal is put in a phase one, between the state of facts and the projects to be realized, in order to provide better life condition in the present times for the inhabitants and to suggest alternative future developments. A new urban strategy is proposed where the appropriation of the liminal spaces on the shores and of the non-qualified open spaces still present locally into the dense informal settlement can represent the challenge thanks to which the spontaneous sociability of the inhabitants could enable the establishment of the absent relationships. Thus - in open contrast with the directions of the approved plans - the urban structure of the *gecekondu* is preserved and becomes itself the generative matrix of a system of relations which is entrusted to direct and manage an inclusive development process. Therefore, just few architectural devices are the interventions needed for the fulfillment of the urban strategy: these elements ease the planned connections, solving the interruptions that at today have denied their realization. The fact that the estuary is itself the main natural barrier to isolate the *gecekondu* and to prevent the fruition of the existing facilities on the southern bank, sets the urge to cross it as the first necessary action to provide the actual social development of the *gecekondu*. A public pedestrian bridge is the emblem of the whole urban strategy, enhancing its criteria: it directs the flows of the connections between the inner areas of the *gecekondu* and the historical city and conjointly defines new open spaces along the shores creating innovative relations with the estuary, eventually rendered to the citizens.

Conclusion

The innovation of the proposed project is about being in opposition to what commonly happens in the Istanbul's urban development processes. The macro-projects tend to undermine the informality of Istanbul, part of the *hinge city's* identity and to be found still today in the *gecekondu*. It is a fact that the placing of a bridge in this part of the estuary recognizes greater values to the informal settlement, so far denied. The project, in addition to provide physical connections between two equally valid zones of the territory, sets ideologically an inclusive development of the *gecekondu*, through social integration and sustainable choices.

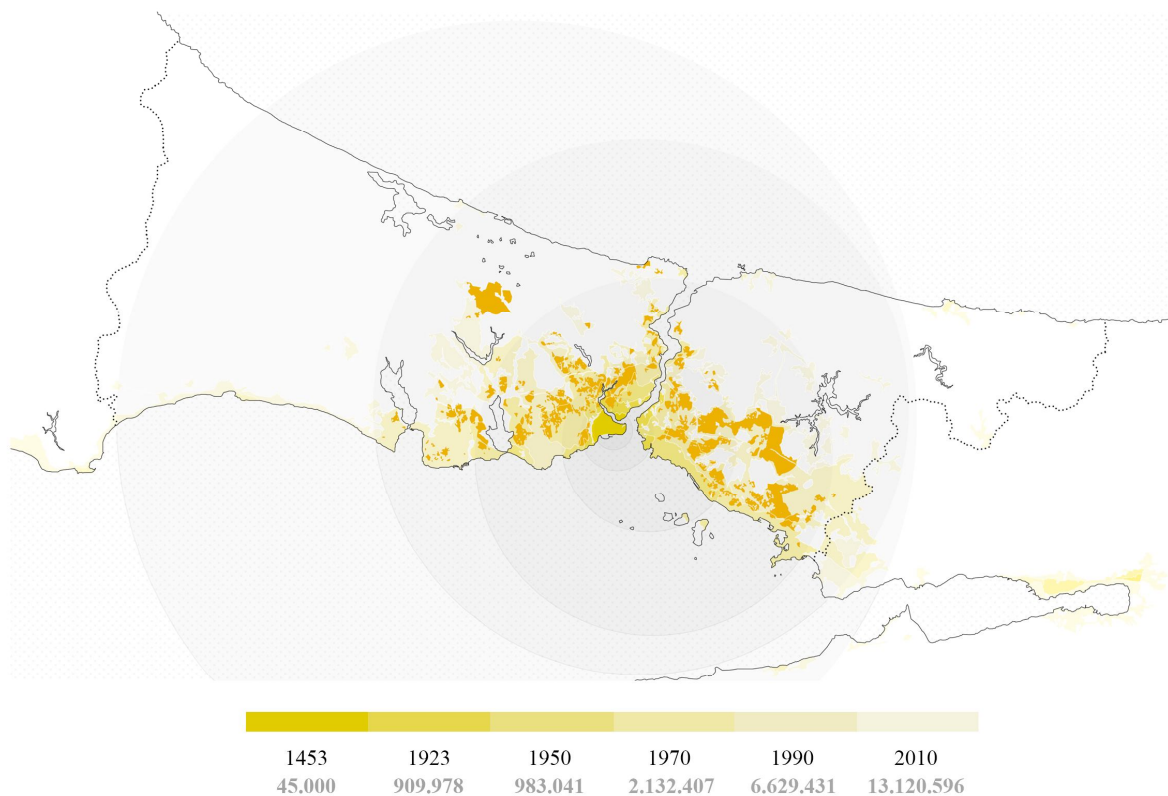


Fig.1 Urban spread and demographic growth of Istanbul. In orange, the areas occupied by the informal settlements (the *gecekondu*) that accomodate almost 6 millions of inhabitants. (Data from *Historical demographical data of the urban centers*, Populstat.info).



Fig.2. Haliç: the green arrows show the homogeneous and continuous system of the urban park on the southern shore in opposition with the fragmented waterfront northwards. In orange, the private facilities (university campuses, museums, naval shipyards, ...) that increase the concept of exclusivity of the open space.



Fig.3. Urban Strategy: individualization of the liminal spaces and of the non-qualified open spaces present in the gecekondu. Establishment of the network of connections between them.

Fig. 4. Masterplan for the median sector of Haliç, with the individualization of the architectural devices (red).

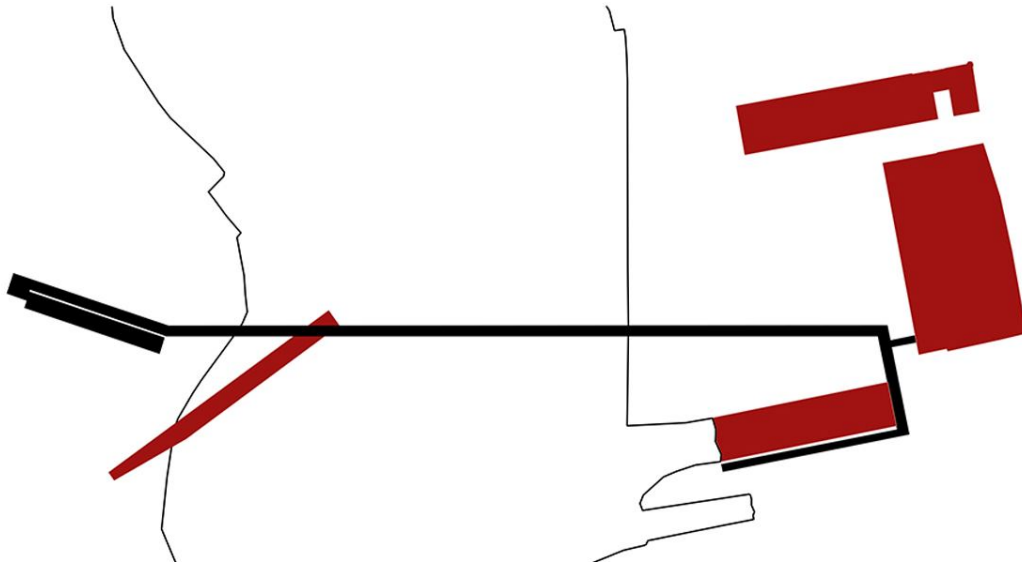


Fig. 5. Diagram of an architectural device: the pedestrian bridge (in black) is the opportunity to re-activate underused buildings and urban spaces (in red).



Fig. 6. General plan of the pedestrian bridge and of the open public spaces it defines: 1) Sport Area; 2) Connection Tower to the bridge; 3) Park Square; 4) Vapur Dock; 5) Marina; 6) Underground Parking; 7) Events Square; 8) Aynalikavak Park; 9) Water Square; 10) Boat Ramp; 11) Market Area; 12) Museum Square.

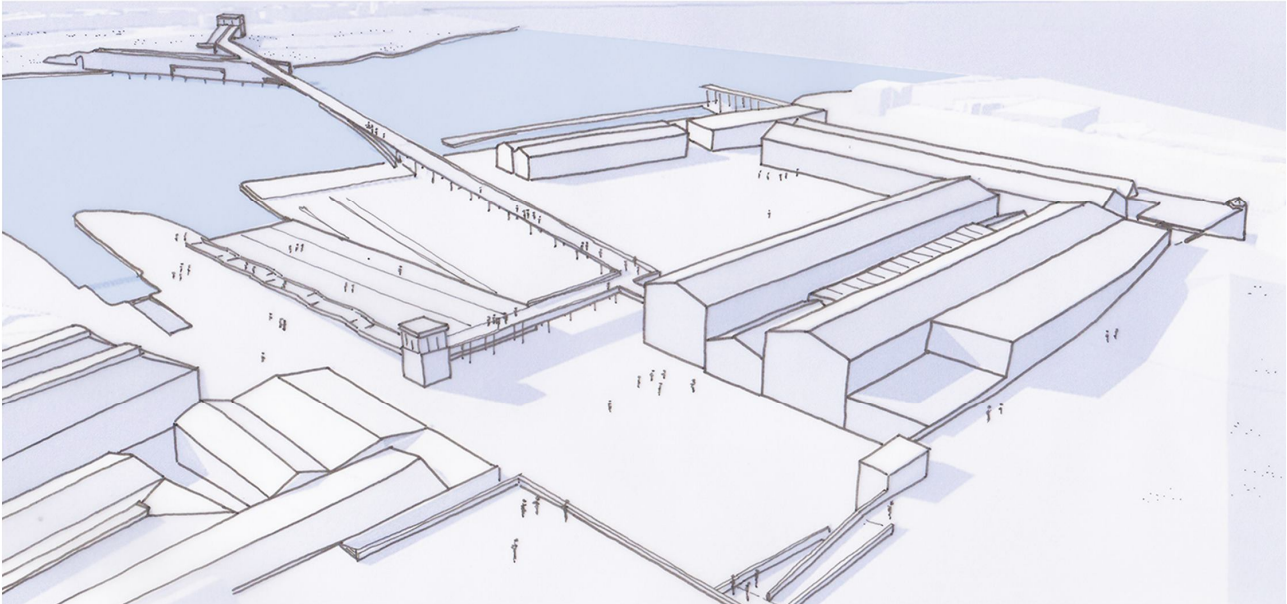


Fig.7. View of the relations established between the bridge and the existing architectural elements.

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