



Renewal Agenda in Istanbul: Urbanisation vs. Urbicide

Zeynep Gunay

Abstract

The paper claims that the renewal schemes, which have been employed as an evolving model in resolving the urbanisation problem, are turned into the instruments of “urbicide” in Istanbul as a political “evolving” model of urban destruction. The concerns arising out of this change of emphasis encompass conflicts between theory and practice, as well as conflicts between marketing and planning, process and action, authenticity and diversity, users and owners, opportunities and threats.

Within this scope, by constructing an urban renewal framework through the exploration of Law on the Protection and the Revitalisation of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Immovable Assets (2005) and Law on the Transformation of Areas under

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Zeynep GUNAY,

*Istanbul Technical University,
Faculty of Architecture, Taşkışla-
Taksim, 34437, Istanbul,
E-mail:gunayz@itu.edu.tr*

Disaster Risk (2012), the paper intends to discuss the evolving and declining urbanisation patterns in Istanbul by relating them with up-to-date political, economic, technological and socio-economic inferences. Considerable emphasis is placed on the use of examples in Historic Peninsula to illustrate and critically analyse meanings, inputs, outputs and impacts. The paper concludes by addressing in what ways the planning as a profession can manage these evolving and declining models in resolving contradictions stemming from the dichotomy of urbanisation and urbicide in Istanbul.

INTRODUCTION

Urban renewal is among the priorities of urban agenda in Istanbul considering the large amount of squatter areas, disaster-vulnerable existing building stock, and historic building stock due to half a century long uncontrolled rapid urbanisation. Eventhough urban renewal is not a new phenomenon in Turkey, 1999 Marmara Earthquakes have played a major role in the rising awareness on the importance of quality of building stock rather than the quantity, as a way to resolve the urbanisation perception by focusing on what already exists and by legitimising urban renewal. On one hand, new laws and regulations have followed the earthquakes to determine the legal and institutional framework of urban renewal. On the other hand, the private sector has valorised this process through the large-scale property-led renewal schemes in the transformation of squatter settlements and deprived urban areas, historic inner-city neighbourhoods, as well as waterfronts, industrial areas, public spaces and natural protection zones into the giant construction zones of economic rant and land speculation. Infact, the paper claims that the large-scale property-led renewal schemes, which have been employed as an evolving model in resolving the urbanisation problem, are turned into the instruments of “urbicide” in Istanbul as a political “evolving” model of urban destruction. The same process has resulted in the declining of participatory, transparent and sustainable approaches of urban planning. The concerns arising out of this change of emphasis encompass conflicts between comprehensive planning and project-based fragmented interventions, process and action, common interests and private interests, authenticity / diversity and standardization, users and owners. Within this scope, by constructing an urban renewal framework through the exploration of Law on the Protection and the Revitalisation of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Immovable Assets (2005) and Law on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk (2012), the paper intends to discuss the evolving and declining urbanisation patterns in Istanbul by relating them with up-to-

date political, economic, technological and socio-economic inferences. Considerable emphasis is placed on the use of examples to illustrate and critically analyse meanings, inputs, outputs and impacts. The paper concludes by addressing in what ways the planning as a profession can manage these evolving and declining models in resolving contradictions stemming from the dichotomy of urbanisation and urbicide in Istanbul.

RATIONALE FOR URBAN RENEWAL

Urban renewal is not a new phenomenon in Istanbul, but it is still among the priorities of urban agenda as an action to cope with the haphazard urbanization patterns and large amounts of squatters due to the uncontrolled rapid urbanization since the 1950s, large amounts of disaster-vulnerable existing building stock due to lack of administrative control over construction and building construction technology, and large amounts of historic building stock in need of careful conservation, rehabilitation and continuous maintenance. As outlined in Gunay et al (forthcoming), the building stock in Istanbul is quite young with a percentage of 66 built after 1980; but the building condition analysis based on the last building count of Turkey in 2000 (TUIK, 2000: 54) shows that most of the buildings constructed before the 2000s should either be demolished or consolidated. While nearly 60% of the total building stock can be termed unauthorized, the challenges on the urban landscape are coupled with the deterioration of physical fabric due to aging or poor maintenance; mismatch between contemporary needs and existing functions; changing perceptions and value judgements on the image of buildings or settlements. The overcrowding and gradual shift in the profile of the inhabitants caused by rural-to-urban migration is also effective in urban deprivation. In addition to the quality of building stock and profile of inhabitants, there is an immense market pressure for transformation in the most economically and culturally valuable zones including the waterfronts, old industrial areas, historic neighbourhoods, public spaces and natural protection zones. Inefficient urban management together with the official obsolescence in providing strategic, flexible, responsive and participatory planning instruments, methodologies and organization forms prevents central and local governments to deal effectively with the problems. These rationales make apparent that there is an urgent need for comprehensive and integrated vision and action to resolve the problems associated with fuzzy urbanisation in Istanbul.



UNESCO/WHC (2010). *Decisions Adopted at the 34th Session of the World Heritage Committee, State of Conservation (Historic Areas of Istanbul)*, Decision WHC-10/34COM 7B.102, Brazilia, 188-156.