
Public Space As a Means of Creating Urban Identity

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, the authors aim to discuss the aim and the outcomes of a term project in Istanbul Kultur University, which was to make students become aware of the role of public places that are one of the most important factors for creating a healthy urban life. Within the scope of the project, the river banks, the periphery of Byzantian city walls and the inactive parcel next to the historical stone bridge were reorganized as urban public spaces in order to create urban memory. The students' projects are expected to contribute to the creation of new future visions for Luleburgaz Municipality that aims to revitalize the town of Luleburgaz.

KEYWORDS. Public Space, Identity, Luleburgaz, Architectural Design Studio

Neslihan Türkün Dostođlu* _ Emrah Türkyılmaz* _ Mehmet Emre Arslan*

**Istanbul Kultur University
E5 Karayolu Üzeri, Atakoy Kampüsü
Bakirkoy 34156 / Istanbul / TURKEY
neslihandost@yahoo.com
e.turkyilmaz@iku.edu.tr
emre0358@yahoo.com
Tel: +90 212 498 4205*

1. Introduction

Invisible Cities, the famous book written by Italo Calvino, is based on the dialogues between Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler, and Kublai Khan, the oriental emperor, who constantly has merchants coming to describe the state of his expanding and vast empire. The majority of the book consists of brief prose poems describing fifty five cities, apparently narrated by Polo. The Venetian traveler talks about strange, magical, invisible cities that nobody else ever saw. And yet, the Khan cannot avoid the feeling that by telling him about those nonexistent places, Marco Polo gradually describes the city they both really think of (Calvino, 1974).

In this paper related with making the city "visible" in architectural education not only as a mere background in which architectural act is located, but as another step of the architectural creation for a meaningful living environment, public space is used as a means of creating urban identity. Dostoglu and Turkyilmaz, who were the coordinators of two groups in Architectural Design Studio VI and VII at İstanbul Kultur University during Spring semester of 2011-2012 academic year, and Arslan, who was the research assistant in both groups, discuss in the paper the studio process, where one of the aims was to make students become aware of the role of public places that are one of the most important factors for creating a healthy urban life, by means of the projects they prepared for Luleburgaz. Within the scope of the studio process, the river banks, the periphery of Byzantian city walls and the problematic parcel next to the stone bridge, designed by the famous Ottoman architect Sinan in Luleburgaz, were reorganized as urban public spaces in order to create urban memory. The authors expect the students' projects to contribute to the creation of new future visions for Luleburgaz Municipality that aims to revitalize the town of Luleburgaz in a healthy process.

2. The Aim and Content of the Architectural Design Studio

In their search for suitable themes for Architectural Design Studios VI and VII, before the beginning of Spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic year, one of the aims of the coordinators was to make students be involved with real urban problems, and to motivate them by emphasizing the fact that their designs might play a catalyzing role in finding solutions for these problems. Luleburgaz was chosen as the town where these aims could be realized because it was a town which had numerous potentials and threats, and because the municipality was quite ready to be involved in the studio process.

Luleburgaz, a town in the north-west part of Turkey, has been an important center with respect to its geographical location throughout history. In the 16th century, a building complex that contains a mosque, a Muslim theological school (medresseh), a khan, a Turkish bath and a bazaar was built by Sinan, the most famous architect of the Ottoman period. A stone bridge, constructed together with the buildings of the complex, connects this complex to Edirne, which was the second capital of the Ottomans. Because of its important commercial location, the town became industrialized and its population increased rapidly in the 20th century. In this process, the newly developed districts became more attractive for the inhabitants of Luleburgaz, and the oldest neighborhood of the town called Dere District was deserted and became rundown. The announcement of a large part of the neighborhood as a protected area, due to the Byzantian city wall ruins, caused uncertainty and uneasiness in the region even further. In addition, the relationship between the neighborhood and Luleburgaz river which gives its name to the district was weakened parallel to the increase in vehicular traffic along the river.

As the population in Lüleburgaz increased parallel to its declaration as a region suitable for industrialization in recent years, a complex cultural structure became prevalent in the town which continues to attract migrants from various parts of Anatolia. The town, which has a young population, is considerably rich socio-culturally and economically. However, public spaces and residential areas in the town, in general, are not adequate in terms of quality and quantity.

As a result of the cooperation with Luleburgaz Municipality at the beginning of the semester, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the town were analyzed, and the social and physical needs of the town were disclosed. In this context, the 4th year architectural students of Istanbul Kultur University were asked to rehabilitate the unqualified housing area close to the historical bridge in Dere District, to create new public spaces by evaluating the Byzantine city walls, and to reorganize the river bank as a recreation area. The main theme of the 3rd year architectural studio, on the other hand, was a cultural center. The expectation from this cultural center was the revitalization of the area both physically and socially, and the development of closed and open public spaces, including the river bank on the other side of the historical bridge.

Dere Neighborhood, which was chosen as the project site, is one of the oldest settlements in the city. Although the area has a rich culture in history, it has lost these characteristics at present. Luleburgaz town has spread towards the south and west in time and the center of the town has moved away from this region. Taking into consideration the historical importance of Mimar Sinan Bridge, and the role that this bridge plays in giving identity to this neighborhood, the Municipality has anticipated a new physical organization in the area by opening this bridge only to pedestrians in its strategic plan.

The project area given to the students in Architectural Design VI studio, was located on the southeast side of Mimar Sinan Bridge in Dere Neighborhood, where the students were asked to design a cultural center with open and closed public spaces comprising various functions, such as wedding hall, library, media center, education spaces, restaurants and cafes. Since the buildings in the area are rather unqualified, the students were allowed to consider the area as vacant. On the other hand, the historical Kadi Ali Mosque located to the east of the project site was to be considered as an important point of reference.

The students in Architectural Design Studio VII were given another design problem on the northeast part of the same bridge. These students were asked to prepare solutions for the housing area which is a registered urban site at present with an important archeological site at the center, comprising historical wall remains from the Byzantine period. Although the housing area is registered as an urban site, there are no registered buildings on the site, and the existing houses were found out to be rather unqualified.



Fig.1



Fig.2

One of the most important opportunities for Architectural Design Studio VI and VII at İstanbul Kultur University was the fact that Luleburgaz Municipality aims to make certain investments for the development of the town, and supports new ideas. Since the projects undertaken in the studio are both in the strategic plan of the Municipality, these were considered as preliminary proposals for the Municipality.

3. The Method Used in Architectural Design Studio

The main functions in the cultural center program given to students in Architectural Design Studio VI were congress hall (~500 m²), mediatech- cinema (~300 m²), art gallery (~400 m²), ateliers (~300 m²), library (~200 m²) and restaurant-cafe (~450 m²).

The students realized the following studies in the studio process:

- The Production of the Site Model - 1/500



Fig.3

- Three Dimensional Modeling: Three dimensional modeling of the site for being used in the projects.
- Location of the Site within the City and the Region, and Transportation Connections (Pedestrian, Vehicular): Indication of the relations of the project site with the main vehicular and pedestrian streets.
- Environmental Analysis (Physical Environment Data: Determination of topography, wind, sun, climate; Character / Identity: Environmental perception analysis, readability in the area, detailed analysis of the character of streets, squares, etc., based on the teachings of Lynch; Environmental Quality: Determination of the location and type of positive qualities (such as historical buildings, panorama points, buildings which are good examples of their period, green areas, monumental trees) or negative qualities (unkempt buildings, buildings which are unqualified or unsuitable for their environment, visual grime due to excessive number of signboards, garbage sites, usage unsuitable for the building or the environment, security problems, etc.)
- Historical Analysis: The research and comparative analysis of the information related with the historical development and transformation of urban space, its social and economic structure, based on old maps, and other old visual materials (photographs, engravings etc.) and reliable written sources about the region.



Fig.4

- Social Analysis: Determining the social characteristics (state of education, labor force distribution, age groups, etc.) of people living in the project site based on TÜİK –(Turkish Statistics Institution) and scientific data, and comparing these with similar data in urban and regional scales

- Economic Analysis: Determination of the role and influence of the project site in urban and regional scales, based on TÜİK and scientific data, and the presentation of its economic situation based on production and consumption data.

The final projects submitted at the end of the semester demonstrate that the students were generally successful in analyzing the characteristics of the project area, and in understanding the information they gathered in this process. In almost all the projects, Mimar Sinan Bridge, Kadı Ali Mosque and historical wall remains, which are important references in the area, were analyzed in detail, and some of the students were able to successfully integrate the buildings which they proposed with these historical buildings. Especially the projects which used the altitude difference in the area were more successful. In many projects, some of the streets which are open to vehicular traffic at present were pedestrianized. All students changed the use of Mimar Sinan Bridge, some converting it into a pedestrian bridge, while others proposed one-way vehicular traffic on it. Another common feature of the projects was the tendency to benefit from the panorama of the river by means of transparent surfaces on the river side of the buildings.

Some of the students in both groups chose to propose their main building complex parallel to the east boundary of the area so that a courtyard could be created allowing many different functions to take place in between Kadı Ali Mosque, the river bank and the road uniting the complex of Sinan with his bridge. Others chose a more scattered layout. However, in all cultural center projects, public open spaces became reference points from which students derived their basic ideas about the buildings.

In the housing project undertaken by the students in Architectural Design Studio VII, public urban spaces were also the points of reference for the basic concepts in the proposals. The students in general developed their proposals taking into consideration the transition from general, semi general, semi private and private spaces.

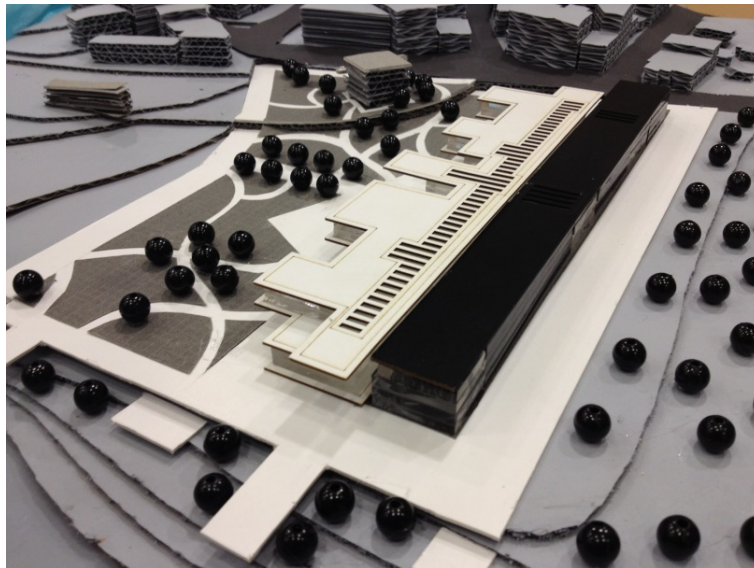


Fig. 6

5. Conclusion

Many architects have commented about the relation between urban and architectural scales. For example, Leon Battista Alberti, an Italian humanist who is seen as a model of the Renaissance “universal man” talks about the relationship of the city and buildings in his book *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* written in mid 15th century: “If the city is like some large house and the house in turn like some small city, cannot the varied parts of the house ... be considered miniature buildings?”

And further on Alberti states: “We earlier described the house as a miniature city. With the construction of a house, therefore, almost everything relevant to the establishment of a city must be taken into account: it should be extremely healthy, it should offer every facility and ever convenience to contribute to a peaceful, tranquil, and refined life” (Alberti, 1988). This means that the corridor can be thought of as a street, the living room a courtyard or a piazza, the garden a park or an orchard, and so on.

Another interesting statement in relation to the relation between architecture and the city was made by Louis I. Kahn in a conceptual sketch dating from 1971: “Architecture is the making of a room; an assembly of rooms. The light is the light of that room. Thoughts exchanged by one and another are not the same in one room as in another. A street is a room; a community room by agreement. Its character from intersection to intersection changes and may be regarded as a number of rooms.” (Tyng, 1984)

Since cities are dynamic bodies, urban and architectural spaces might embody different functions and meanings according to socio-cultural, economic and technological transformations in history. In other words, the physical characteristics of urban and architectural spaces might be more persistent than their functions. In order to upgrade the quality of life in a city, it is necessary to realize that a city is a living organism, and that the formation of qualified environments requires an evaluation of socio-cultural as well as physical qualities.

The improvement of the physical qualities of the environment means the production of safe, useful, and healthy open and closed spaces in terms of light, ventilation, heat and noise. However, in order for societies to continue their existence and to be reproduced, it is not enough to improve the physical comfort in the environment. In addition, the environment has to bear meanings which reflect the values and needs of the users, and it has to have a dynamic structure suitable for social changes.

Evidently, each school of architecture develops its own character, built around a different curriculum. In an increasingly globalized world, however, cultural contexts homogenize, social, economic and institutional frameworks inevitably merge. Similar to many other schools of architecture, the relationship between urban and architectural scales are particularly considered and discussed in Architectural Design Studio VI in the second semester of the third year and Architectural Design Studio VII and VIII in the fourth (senior) year at İstanbul Kultur University.

The following were the questions that were addressed this year:

How do people live in Luleburgaz? Are they aware of the opportunities present in the town, such as Luleburgaz river, the historical stone bridge or the kulliyeh buildings by the famous architect Sinan? Do they know that there are historical Byzantine walls hidden among the houses in Dere neighborhood? Can public spaces become a means of creating urban identity? To what extent architecture might intervene with the everyday

life? What is the social role of an architect? Might environmental sustainability be a reference for the development of urban life?

These questions and many more were discussed for producing new approaches to both the housing area, and also the cultural center in Dere neighborhood, with the aim of improving everyday life in Luleburgaz. Third and fourth grade students studied in two different groups led by two studio instructors and one research assistant. Two mid-term juries and one final jury were organized with the participation of well known professional architects, and also civil servants from Luleburgaz Municipality. Discussions in the studio were based on several parameters: Relationship between open and closed spaces, urban identity, sustainability, public space, accessibility, distance, image, prestige, view, social relations. The aim of the studio coordinators was to demonstrate how students tackle the problem of the integrating buildings with the city and vice versa through the media of housing and cultural center in social and physical terms.

6. Legends

- Figure 1: Site Photo
- Figure 2: Site Photo
- Figure 3: Model that shows the existing situation
- Figure 4: Analysis
- Figure 5: Student Project
- Figure 6: Student Project

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8. Biography

Neslihan Türkün Dostođlu, is an architect. She graduated from Middle East Technical University (B.Arch. 1978, M.Arch. 1981), and University of Pennsylvania (Ph.D. 1986), and served as the Chair of the Department of Architecture at Uludag University for nine years. Presently, she is a Professor of Architecture and the Chair of Architecture at İstanbul Kültür University. Her interest areas are architectural design, environment and behavior, and architectural education.

Emrah Türkyılmaz is an architect, graduated in the School of Architecture of İstanbul Yıldız Technical Universtiy. He has a master of science degree in Architectural Design in the School Of Architecture of Yıldız Technic University. He has a PhD in the same university. He is an assistant professor in İstanbul Kultur University.

Mehmet Emre Arslan is an architect, graduated in the School of Architecture of İstanbul Yıldız Technical Universtiy. He has a master of science degree in Architectural Design in the School Of Architecture of istanbul Technic University. His PhD is still in progress in the same university. He is a research assistant in İstanbul Kultur University.