



Tensions and Transformations in the Master Planning Process of Istanbul

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This paper addresses the conference theme of Urban transformation and the issues of urban space - urban form and architecture, urban transformation in heritage sites, landscapes, waterfronts, and public spaces. Since the beginning of the Turkish Republic which was established in 1923, there have been several major Master Planning initiatives in Istanbul. The first of these high profile master plans was "Plan Directeur d' Istanbul" by Henri Prost of 1937. The emphasis of the Prost plan, which sought to implement western planning principles that were already experimented with Morocco and France, was to modernize the infrastructure of the city focusing on new highways and a bridge linking the European and Asian parts of it. The latest plan which was formulated in 2008 by the Greater Istanbul Municipality seeks to establish a balance between conservation and development and to integrate the city into the world economy to reassert its position as a major metropolis in its region. A central idea of several contemporary planning efforts has been a number of Urban Transformation projects. These are Eurasia Corridor Project (Edirne-Istanbul Axis), Central Business Areas (Mega) Project, (Mega) Transformation Project for Istanbul, National and Global Communication Center Transformation Project within the Prestige Axis Foreseen by the Master Plan, Green Corridor Transformation Project Extending North Forests from the Black Sea to the Marmara, Natural and Living (Mega) Environmental Transformation Project Stressing on World Water and Botanical Culture on Water Catchment Sites and Golden Horn Environment Protection Project.

These transformation projects have served as a catalyst for other specific planning initiatives. Some of these were initiated by the central government and others by the local authority. They include four especially controversial proposals which are Haydarpasha port Railway Station, The Redevelopment of the IETT Bus Garage on the European side to include two large skyscrapers called the Dubai Towers, the Kartal Pendik Urban Transformation Project which was awarded to architect Zaha Hadid as a result of an international competition and Galataport Touristic Center.

Both the Prost plan of 1937 and the latest IMP plan of 2008 differ widely in their strategic goals. The Prost 1937 plan had a dramatic impact upon the city in terms of infrastructure improvement but it did not substantially alter the relationship between the city skyline and the Bosphorus that has been a unique characteristic of Istanbul since its founding as Constantinople and its subsequent alteration by Turks since it was captured in 1453. That transformation is significant because the Ottomans, in a symbolic gesture of appropriation of power, were placed the Christian historical monuments on the seven hills with mosques whose domes and minarets became identified with the silhouette of the city from the water.

The last Master plan of 2008 and other master plans that have recently preceded it, however, have opened the door to significant alteration of that skyline which is a central part of the urban identity of Istanbul. The tension inherent in the transformation of the Galata hill and its tower for example are characteristic of the controversy involved in these new initiatives.

This paper will address these tensions in terms of the different viewpoints of each of the actors involved as Istanbul seeks to take its place as a major world city.

KEY WORDS: Istanbul, urban transformation projects, tension and transformation, master planning.