



Planning of the City as a Political Act: Istanbul Atatürk Boulevard

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In the 1930s the urban image of the new Turkish Republic's "modernity project" was a reflection of the garden city utopia and the scene chosen for this ideological scenario of the young nation state was not the intrinsically multi-ethnic, non-homogeneous, cosmopolitan Istanbul but Ankara, the new capital with powerful symbolic references. The state-based economy of the 1930s and 1940s created a new equilibrium with the slow development of the private sector. This was going to mark the end of the period when the central administration was the major client for architecture while the private sector entered the scene as an employer. Following its fall from grace in the 1930s, Istanbul has reborn and regained its dominating power mostly in the post-war period and notably in the 1950s under the effect of utterly different socio-economic dynamics. The 1950s also proved to be an important turning point not only for Istanbul but for Turkey as well. The modernity project of the state saw a fundamental transformation due to the change in the political system from a single-party regime to a multi-party one and the "cultural identity" dilemma of the "modernity project" itself. Changes in the political discourse led to a dense migration to Istanbul from all over Anatolia but at the same time to the loss of Istanbul's native ethnic groups. This radical demographic change and the population boom in conjunction with the reflections of patron-client relationship based politics, became a turning point for the city and dominated the urban transformation. Henceforth, the urban scene of the state's power was not the homogeneous (administrative) capital Ankara but Istanbul, the capital of internationalization, finance and culture. Specifically the effects of international relations on economic structure had a major role in the reshaping the city. Executive power for the urban planning decisions was no longer resided with local authorities but was manipulated by the prime minister himself. The radical transformation of the urban fabric especially in the historic peninsula was the primary subject of discussions and the focus of criticism.

This paper aims to explore the transformation of the Ataturk Boulevard as a major urban axis under the pressure of changing political preferences. The boulevard, traversing the historic peninsula from the Golden Horn to the Marmara Sea, became an urban scene of political power where public, administrative, commercial and residential buildings embodying the changing dynamics were located side by side.

KEY WORDS: Effect of politics on planning, modernization, Istanbul Atatürk Boulevard.