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## UNFOLDING ISTANBUL'S CHANGE THROUGH ITS INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

Zeynep Tulumen, PhD candidate, Politecnico di Torino, Italy

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### ABSTRACT

*Istanbul is unique for being an amalgamation of different urban forms as an outcome of divergent regimes since its twenty-seven century-long life. The city, was founded under Pagan rules as a small Greek settlement, it later became Constantinople; a Christian-Byzantine capital. Afterwards, it turned into Istanbul; an Islamic-Ottoman capital and finally transformed into a Turkish republican megapolis. Today, it reached the 21st century as a global megalopolis, Istanbul's enduring transformation hasn't stopped yet. On the contrary, its inner-city fabrics are mutating under pressure of the latest global driving forces such as tourism and finance. Thus, this giant urban territory is adapting itself to the new consumption patterns of 21st century where contemporary stratifications are starting to be formed. This paper wants to show through three case studies, at a neighborhood scale, how nowadays the urban pattern of Istanbul is experiencing transition processes due to new emerging lifestyles. Fikirtepe, Karakoy, Bomonti want to be emblematic examples to explain, within a global extent, the present morphological transitions in the different parts of the contemporary city. The research will demonstrate the results of diachronic comparative analysis through maps that are created based on municipal plans and field surveys.*

*Keywords: transitional morphologies, Istanbul, 21<sup>st</sup> century, urban land*

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### INTRODUCTION

The city of the 21st century is being shaped by the economic changes that started to take place in the late 20. Century. Its transformation has been exacerbated due to the flow of globalization movement, structural shifts in the economy, and new technologies (Friedmann, 1986). The transition from a productive city to a global city, where the service sector is dominant, has detectably determined the new circumstances for cities' urban fabric. All of a sudden, previously abandoned inner-city areas became attractive for new service sectors (such as culture, recreation, tourism, finance, etc.) consumers and producers. This stimulated the development of new centralities and reshaped the spatial configuration in a dissimilar scale.

Istanbul is no exception to that. It has been transformed from a settlement with a population of 2.8 million 50 years ago to a metropolitan city with 15.5 million residents today; a result of intensive internal migration and rapid urbanization controlled under neoliberal policies that led to a significant spatial change, particularly in the last decades. The latest masterplan 2009 highlights the importance of the transiting sectors in national development. To provide a competitive advantage in the global platform to Istanbul; the current sectoral structure is targeted to be transformed predominantly into top-level services. In this direction, the employment structure, 32% of which used to be industry, 60% of services, and 8% of agriculture, is projected to alternate toward 70% service 25% industry and 5% agriculture. In the long run, it is pride that these values projected as 75%, 20%, and 5%, respectively (IMM, 2009).

Until 1980, Istanbul's core was positioned in the historical peninsula and the city had a single CBD, in Eminonu and Beyoglu districts, where it's main business and commercial activities was located. (Enlil, 2011). The organized industry was present mainly in the historical peninsula in Kazlıcesme,

Eyup, Halic near Golden Horn and was extending until Kagithane and Bomonti (Arslan, 1974). Within the structural shift that started to occur starting from the late 20th century, the traditional CBD could no more respond to the requirements of the upcoming demand due to the diseconomies of agglomeration. The increasing population and changing industries required adequate transportation, accessibility, parking, and larger working spaces. Consequently, the CBD moved gradually from the historical center where it was present in mono-centric form toward the northern part, Zincirlikuyu – Levent - Maslak ax in Besiktas and Sisli districts, in axial-linear form. The development of infrastructure, for example, the construction of Bosphorous Bridge in 1973 and the provision of peripheral highways, enabled substantially the dispersion of these new centralities (Dökmeci & Berköz, 1994). As well as, the organized industry shifted toward the outskirts of the city scattering between west and east of the territory. This was partially due to health and safeness issues but more importantly due to low land prices in peripheral areas where economies of agglomeration were applied.

The transformation that started by the 80s was accelerated at the beginning of the 21st century with impressive economic growth. Starting from the 2000s growing transportation infrastructures, construction projects on vacant land, and transformation of the existing built environment have become the physical reflections of this growth (Islam 2010). Tourism and international flows were introduced predominately in the urban agenda. As a result, the overall spatial configuration of the city started to undergo noticeable transition and particular portions of the urban land were exposed to high demand thanks to their conceivable economic opportunity. Such socio-economic transitions within the city are reflected visibly in its urban space as well as in its form. The urban fabric, hence, becomes at the same time a condition in shaping economic forces and an outcome of the corresponding trends. This study, in particular, wants to reveal the transformation of the built – space which is exposed to high-demand in contemporary Istanbul.

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## METHODOLOGY

Accordingly, the study will use three selected case studies, at a neighborhood scale, to explore in which way the urban pattern of the city is experiencing transition processes due to new emerging lifestyles. Istanbul is the macro laboratory and Fikirtepe, Karakoy, Bomonti neighborhoods want to be emblematic examples that serve as microcosms to discover undergoing change in different parts of the city. Fikirtepe is situated in Kadikoy district, on the Asian side of Istanbul, and is famous for being one of the earliest squatter areas. Karakoy is an important historical commercial neighborhood located on the east of the historical peninsula in the European waterfront section.

Bomonti is a former industrial site in Sisli district close to the main CBD of the city, characterized by old manufacture and vacant land. They are representative samples respectively from the informal, historical, and industrial legacies of the territory. A diachronic comparative analysis for each area is conducted through maps that are created based on municipal plans and field surveys between 2006 and 2019, for almost a decennial period, to explore the type of transmutation within the selected samples.

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## FIRST SAMPLE

Fikirtepe neighborhood is famous for being one of the earliest squatter areas, situated in Kadikoy district on the Asian side of Istanbul. The area was started to be shaped since the 1950s by the immigrants who worked in the surrounding factories and who moved here by making their slums on the lands they bought. It is situated between one of the main highways passing inside the city (D-

100) and Bağdat Street which is the most important commercial street of the Anatolian Istanbul. The area can be recognized through its informal morphological pattern. It consists of large narrow plots occupied by small to medium-sized buildings and shelters organized around a narrow street network with a high building density. The architecture in the area is consist of gecekondu and apartmentkondu typology, which was born as a result of rural to urban migration (Duyar-Kienast, 2005). These are poorly constructed one to three floors houses that are usually made of briket without any carrying elements. As the city continued to cultivate and grow, this area became closer to the CBD of Kadikoy and affluent neighborhoods over time. Being adjacent to a prestigious street and close to highway exits towards the Bosphorus Bridge, Fikirtepe had an opportune location for auspicious growth. Moreover, the insertion of important infrastructure projects such as Marmaray, Kadikoy-Kartal metro line, Metrobus line strengthen the accessibility of the area, and the creation of a new financial center nearby in Atasehir by 2008 brought a new consumer profile that could potentially exploit the neighborhood. Accordingly, in 2010 the transformation of the area was announced to the public and in 2012 the first plot clearance took place. The redevelopment of the area is being led by private architectural firms and construction companies who dedicate close attention due to the profitability of the urban land.



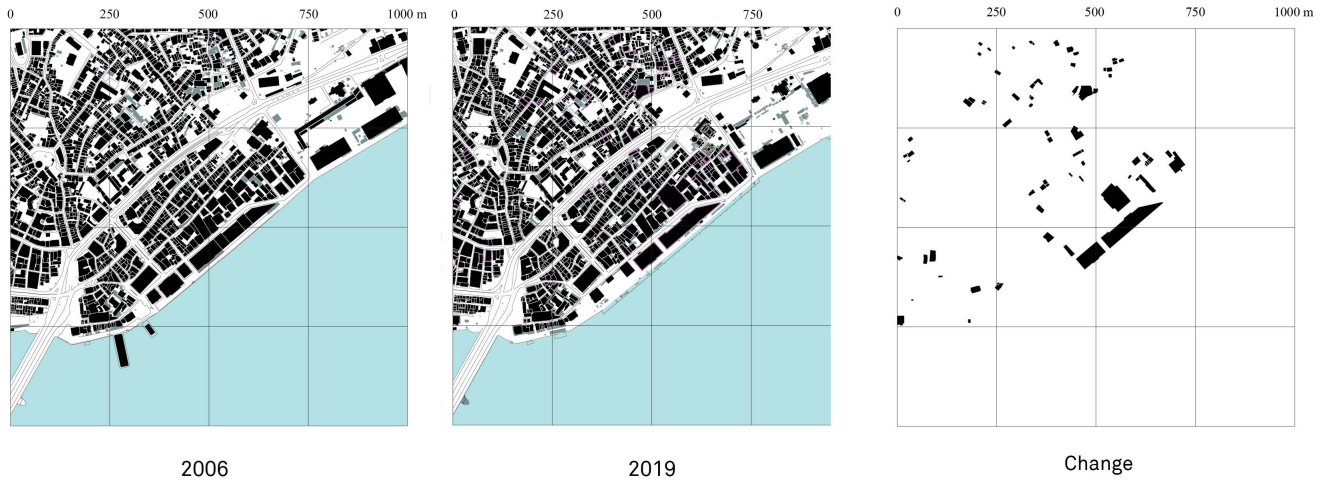
Figure 1. Transition of the building fabric in Fikirtepe. Source: Original production

Through the comparative maps, it can be noticed that the transformation, in this case, takes on a large scale. The demolitions are realized at a plot scale and the existing low-rise dense urban forms are being replaced by high-rise urban form. The street pattern remains the same, spindly plots are unified forming larger square plots with more open space. Newly constructed skyscraper typologies are laid out as detached urban elements in different shapes on the map. Projects like Concord Istanbul, Brooklyn Park, Elit Concept, Mandarin Acibadem are some examples of the luxury towers that put together residential, office, and commercial functions together. These are destined to medium to high-income consumers of the 21st century that has different consumer preferences respect to former residents

## SECOND SAMPLE

Karakoy is well-known for being the oldest trade center for centuries and an important harbor of the city, located on the European consolidated side of Istanbul, on the east of the historical peninsula. The neighborhood consists of compact urban blocks formed mainly by row houses, detached monumental architecture, and warehouses organized along the axes and the shore. Most of the buildings are examples of late 19. and early 20. Century Western style from the Ottoman

period and late 20. Century modern structures. Karakoy's charm, which was vanished by the late 20th century due to its inadequate capacity to host developing port function, started to regrow dramatically in the eye of the investors during the last two decades. This was thanks to the strength of its location, and the capacity to become an important point that could accommodate service functions for the expected tourist load in the city.



**Figure 2. Transition of the building fabric in Karakoy. Source: Original production**

Through the comparative maps between 2006 and 2019, minor typological changes can be observed within the built fabric. In all the revealed points, the smaller attached units are unified in order to create a bigger unit. Surely, the traditional typologies present in the area are no more adequate to host new services neither qualitatively nor quantitatively. This is the case for example of hotel facilities that need larger surfaces to run their function. While local cafes and boutiques can be more handily adaptable on the previous narrow ground floor plan with some minor changes in the interior organization. Furthermore, if we examine the owner of the enlarged typologies, it is noticed abounding dominance of important international and national players such as; Starbucks, Novohotel, Marriot, HSBC, Nabu, and so on. These are powerful hotel chains, coffee chains, banks, or holdings recognized nation/worldwide. Within these analyses, it seems that typological transformations are occurring in the form of unification and densification only with the presence of strong international or national mechanisms. Finally, in the area, it is observed that general urban layout remains the same, nevertheless, single buildings are being demolished, modified, and unified in order to create larger typologies. A striking change in the overall structure of the urban tissue is not observed, while a remarkable change in the use of space can be laid out.

### THIRD SAMPLE

Bomonti neighborhood is well-known for being the first industrial establishment in the region, located within the boundaries of Şişli district. With the establishment of the first brewery in the country in 1890, Bomonti, which was established in a city edge where the land price was low, has become an official urban industrial zone by the mid 20th century. In the neighborhood, slums, industrial establishments, and residences coexisted, and in this sense, it was a different industrial zone than other organized industrial areas of Istanbul. Bomonti is situated close to one of the main arteries that connect two continents and proximate to the main CBD of the city, Levent-Maslak axes. The historical factory, which has been actively operating for a long time, was stopped in 1991 and other dismissions of industrial activities persecuted that. The area was declared as a tourism center

at the beginning of the 21st century, later, a central business area in 2005, and received intensive zoning rights to encourage private developers. This decision potentially was shaped due to the existing lands whose construction permissions were increased. Accordingly, large capital groups started to deposit their capital in the area and turned this place into a profitable investment occasion by purifying the manufacturing identity to host business activities together with residential, hotel, and entertainment functions.



**Figure 3. Transition of the building fabric in Bomonti. Source: Original production**

Through the comparative map analysis, it can be observed that industrial tissue including barracks and open spaces are turned transformed into detached high-rise urban forms. The plot pattern remains almost untouched, still, some streets are added. The biggest transformation is represented in the building pattern. Besides the old brewery factory whose forms remained identical, new emerging architectural forms are creating high-density spaces with low land coverage hosting luxury residence, hotel and office functions. Projects like Anthill Residence, Rixos Residences, Elysium Fantastic, Hilton are big players that are settled in the area under these forms. Moreover, further transmutations can be observed in the surroundings of the former industrial island. The street in the north-west of the island has been enlarged and existing informal tissue has disappeared. Traces of evictions and clearance of existing organic tissue can be noticed. This fabric has been replaced by regular blocks which are recognized as apartment typology. Certain voids present within the formal fabric are completed and some units are unified to create bigger ones.

## CONCLUSION

From the mapping analysis which shows the evolution of the urban tissue within the last ten years for the selected case studies, certain findings emerge. In the following, brief considerations at a microscopic scale on specific cases are done to arrive at macroscopic observations about Istanbul.

First, Fikirtepe's transformation seems to be associated with improved accessibility in the area. The development and refinement of transportation means seem to enable the exploitation of a favorable location. The mutation of urban layout occurs on a large scale, applied in building and plot patterns under the form of forced/planned demolition and diffusion. Second, Karakoy's transformation seems to be catalyzed from its proximity to the traditional historical center, the availableness of the existing building stock, and favorableness of the authentic urban tissue to host expected tourist flows in the area. The mutation of urban layout occurs on a small scale, exclusive

to building units under the form of densification and unification with a sporadic behavior. Last, Bomonti's transformation would seem to occur thanks to its available vacant land stock, its affinity with the main CBD, and busy urban arteries of the city. In this case, the mutation of urban layout appears on a medium – large scale, mainly applied to building patterns under the form of planned demolition and expansion.

The location, meaning the relation with the outlying urban system, would seem like a crucial condition to trigger an interest that could affect in different ways the local spatial configuration. By the time, enclave circumstances have been constituted in all three cases which later, by exposing to series of spatial and social events, gave birth to sharp transitions. Consequently, urban forms have mutated under the form of densification, unification, diffusion, expansion. This observation brings out a trend in the creation of spacious, unbroken elements that are achieved through the enlargement and homogenization of urban components. This might go against the organic and rich urban fabric of the existing city. Moreover, new players such as multi-national chains and national enterprises, are dominantly appearing in those neighborhoods as the main agents of the current change. Within their presence, although the permeability of the ground floor could rise, the flow of consumer type chops round radically. While low-middle class disappears, medium-high class proliferate abundantly.

The study through three samples wanted to demonstrate concretely, how the city of the 21st century, contemporary Istanbul is transforming under emerging non-spatial dynamics. The built environment served as an encoder to understand the nature of transition and agents involved. The reasons that initiate the interest and the resulting morphologies, by all means, are differentiating slightly for all cases, still, they allow to reveal common socio-spatial impacts on a larger territory.

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## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Zeynep Tulumen, PhD Candidate, Department of Architecture and Design, Politecnico di Torino, Italy.  
[zeynep.tulumen@polito.it](mailto:zeynep.tulumen@polito.it)