

'SPACE' AS COMPONENT AND INDICATION OF CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENT PROBLEMS

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I. INTRODUCTION

As known, man is the only specie with the ability to transform the nature by means of technology. Architecture, can be defined as the action of establishing a control over nature. All types of intervention made in this scope, even a simple stone wall or a wooden hut, do effect the sensitive system of relations regarding the global ecological order¹ which we traditionally call as "social". The mankind ability to transform his environment in order to fulfil his own requirements has been dramatically increased as developments made in the field of technology took place in the course of history.

Today, entering the twenty first century, the man is facing the most serious problem of the history of civilisation. The emissions produced by conversion fossil-based natural resources have a proven deleterious effect on the environment.

Furthermore, uncontrolled intensive cultivation, destructive exploitation of raw materials and global reduction of agricultural areas are leading to a systematic diminution of natural habitats. Everyday two hundred fifty square metres of rain fields are becoming extinct, and three living species are becoming extinct every hour. Natural environment devastation have effected everywhere on earth from industrial wastes in developed countries to sea pollution in all seas of the world. Today in many places around the world, people suffer from misery and hunger and if the devastation of natural sources continue in this way, it is seen that poverty will continue to increase by sharpening. Between the years of 1960-1991, the richest 20% upper slice of the world population increased its share of prosperity from 70% to 85%, while the share of the poorest 20% slice fell from 2.3% to 1.4%.

There is a fact reflected by anxieties regarding environmental problems at both local and cultural levels, scientific studies made, problems we have been facing most importantly from first hand: It is known and accepted by everyone that present lifestyle in western societies with the way and speed of consumption of current natural resources, largely based on oil, are not tenable in the long run, and that this short- term expediency should be replaced by more sustainable patterns of living.

This approach receives a wide acceptance at social and individual level and all parties share similar opinions about the environment at the level of principles. However, the question that needs to be asked is whether this opinions are strong enough to change the dominant way of life, consumption habits, social and individual values and objective criteria for "good life" and "improvement" .

¹ Davey, P., 'Architectural Review' "A Moral Issue", 1998/4.

II. ABOUT ENVIRONMENT – CULTURE RELATION

- "Culture (or civilisation) is a complex whole comprising the knowledge, art, ethics, traditions and other similar abilities and habits humans gain as a member of the society." (Tylor, 1871)
- "Culture; being a sum of phenomena (behavioural coverage), objects (products obtained with tool and tools) and ideas (knowledge and beliefs) and senses (attitudes and values); is a continual, social and evolutionary process based on utilisation of symbols". (White, 1945)
- "The notion of culture can be used for shaping human behaviours and effecting or having effected the works created by behaviours; for value, thought and other similar symbolic meaning-notion systems with a content re-created." (Kroeber, 1958)
- "Culture is a sum of material and moral values created by man. Culture has an area of existence only in material and moral values system. Culture develops with the evolution of the society" (Zvorikine , 1967)

According to the definitions of 'culture' it can be seen as a way of living. Especially in the designing process for architects, 'culture' becomes a dominating factor of the process and we talk about 'made environment' which is created by man. Our environment is a picture of the civilizations we created throughout the history. 'Cultural environment' can also be polluted as water, air, flora or fauna etc. Throughout the history, different societies have shaped their cities and environments with their cultural features. In this regard, we can see "culture" as a "way of life". An arrangement made by social institutions with their own means upon these experiences. This arrangement is a "complex scope" and no dimension of society is outside it. The "environment" we create is a reflection of our cultural infrastructure and experience to the location.

If we consider the urbanisation experience our country (Turkey) went through in our recent history; especially in our big cities population boom, unhealthy and uncontrolled urbanisation make any kind of protective approaches respecting humans, nature and cultural presences impossible.

Urbanisation formation of Turkey, did not make any reservations for public institutions in cities and preservation of green areas in cities possible, it has prevented establishment of green systems in cities. This way of development has created the insufficiency of public service areas. The way of development accommodating with the understanding of rent of cities causes retreat of the quality of 'urban life'.²

Urbanisation has been developing under the control of the state, official organisations and administrations and within a system where illegal groups are transformed into forces of power. This process has brought with itself not only illegal constructing with regards physical planning and urban law but also a value deterioration socially. What is been co-operated in essence, is not the laws and legality, but the vulgar force and organised corruption. Illegal housing is widely integrated with politics at local and national level. What realised together with the notion of immigration starting especially after 1945 and increasing within the last 15 years; is that cities have come to a point of losing their identities and function as social meeting and living spaces due to the culture and way of life produced by this process of

² UN Human Settlements Conference Habitat II Turkey National Report and Action Plan : 1996, 36).

destroying the environment. The 'new' culture rejecting traditions of agricultural culture based on feudal values dominant in rural areas, and not adopting the 'city' culture owning the value system of industrial society, has taken the society increasingly under its effect. With the degradation becoming a way of life, our people have become insensitive in a degree not to see the environment in which they live.³

Today, rapid changes in the field of communication and the possibilities created can also be evaluated as a revolution of acculturation. This process is lived also with the media, radio-TV, computers, art currents, etc. 'Globalisation' talked about is not something different from this process.⁴

In the following parts we are trying to explain some spatial changes in our big cities caused by the process of 'globalisation'. For example, in the area of housing we are able to define some new 'typologies of housing' derived from the capital relations of globalisation process. As the big holdings at the building sector are active during this period some huge and monumental buildings as big hotels, shopping centres, or exhibition halls fill the space of the city today.

It seems to be inescapable for the architects to institutionalise their resoluteness on this matter by reassessing their design approaches in the light of information determined with scientific methods and to develop new criteria and norms for a sustainable design by re-defining their functions within the architectural design process.

As Alto insistently states in his works and writings, "... a meaningful architecture is something more than a protective umbrella; a good architecture establishes an interaction with us that will be beneficial for us; we become more human with their help, it is something more than shelter, a beneficial good, transient game. It is a constructed record of our cultural characteristics of how we organise our cultural priorities, who and what we are, and what we believe in. It is our testament we write on stones."

Man rightly asks, what is the testament we are building today?

Do we feel the responsibility of the response we give to this question.

³ Kongar, E. '21. Yüzyılda Türkiye', Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul 1998; p.578.

⁴ Güvenç, B. 'Kültür Konusu', Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul 1997, p.87.

III. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the difference in definitions, objectives and priorities, environment makes a major issue for both the developed and developing countries. For the developed world, the problem is how to maintain living standards while establishing sustainability. One can broadly suggest that, environmental consciousness, in western world, express itself as a mere problem of creating an “architecture beyond style”. In case of developing countries, on the other hand, the problem has other complexities:

For developing countries, like Turkey, the problem seems to appear as how to meet the basic needs and improve the level of economic sustenance without producing damaging industrial pollution. Today, everyone agrees that the responsibility towards environment and social consciousness in developing countries is more important than ever. Although the idea or concept of environment is slowly gaining ground, it is yet very far from giving any new directions for living and designing. “ Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs” 1987 Bruntland Report definition for sustainability, is a widely accepted principle as an objective, proves to be insufficient as a practical guideline for developing countries. In order to address these goals, one would be hoped to develop ways to design better and more responsive built spaces. Unfortunately, in Istanbul –our case study town- it is hard to find examples of this new way of designing and building. Like most developing countries, Turkey, is struggling with typical problems associated with urbanisation and change, from over-populated cities and corruption to devastation of natural resources and unemployment. In other words, the strongest objectives for these people are still very basic. They reach for shelter, food, health care and education. It is evident that in the Third World priorities are still determined by the dual imperatives of death and endurance.

In this parts of the world, people are unable to evolve a way to question the way they live, design and build simply because they are reduced to mere objects driven by irresistible forces of the very basic needs for survival. It is clear that environmental consciousness and sustainability are only partly about the architecture and new ways of designing and building.

Yet, the role of cities as a place for ‘becoming conscious’ and ‘enlightenment’ can not be denied. The ability of men to be participant and sharing should also be seen as part of urbanisation process.

In this paper we will try to discuss problems and formations specific to Istanbul, Turkey –concerning urbanisation and environment, as a case study for developing countries. There are a number of critical issues that rise the set of general questions: Can the “Third World” evolve a way of life and design that will allow them to live in greater harmony with natural world while improving their living standards, and how the social changes effect the environment in Istanbul as opposed to Western societies are two major problematic issues for the case studies.

IV. ISTANBUL- A CASE STUDY FOR THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES;

THE CONVERSION OF URBAN AND RESIDENTIAL SPACES.

Istanbul's housing demands as the biggest city of Turkey (with population of nearly 13 million people) we can divide and study in 3 periods:

- Early period (The beginning period of 'gecekondu' settlements in the beginning of 1950)
- Second period (the period of changing requirements of the middle classes after the 2nd World War)
- Today's requirements and new shapes of settlements (in the process of globalisation)

In this paper we will mainly deal with the third level of the housing process of Istanbul. We will try to show the reflection of the cultural change to city and space and furthermore to the environment and living pattern. So we can conclude with the role of the culture in the formation of societal identity and formation of conflicts.

First we would like to give some information about the mentioned history of housing changes.

In the first period mentioned above Istanbul's population has stayed almost stable. There has not been a real housing problem by then. But after the 2nd World War the problem of immigration, population and unhealthy urbanisation occurred. The population reached 9 millions by 1995⁵ and almost 13 millions today. First 'gecekondu' settlements were taking place in the areas outside of the city limits. The area settled was out of the city. As a matter of fact this process ended up with a chaotic solution in urban planning. Because both, the most expensive private housings and around them the 'gecekondu' were taking place together at the same time within a circle.
(Slides)

In this level of urban deformation 'gecekondu' has been used as a means of political abuse. Also it caused some discrimination problems in the society.

In the second period we can talk about the changing demands of the middle classes. As all over the world the consuming standards and concepts have been changed rapidly, a new typology of 'housing' arrived. New materials, new designing concepts and interiors have been a pulling factor especially by the trends of the middle class. Also some new regulations of apartment housing were formulated and accepted creating the new 'ideal' for the middle class, namely 'apartment flats'. Until the end of 1970's the dominant feature of the housing has been 'comfortable' apartment flats. Meanwhile there was a new professional group in the sector of building which is the 'building contractor'. This period has really a lot of bad effects of the city, as it allowed old big buildings in gardens to be replaced by new and 'comfortable' apartments. The city has been changed rapidly. As a result of this, the ecology of the city changed which means some gentrifications, discriminations and new values.

As we enter a new century, there has been another quick change in the formation and the creation of new values and concepts. With the flow of 'knowledge', 'capital', 'money', 'human beings' and 'goods' we already started

to examine a new balance. In housing demands we can study new perspectives, which are actually some reactions.

First of all liberal capitalistic system allowed lots of new buildings financed by the strongest groups or holdings in housing area.

Secondly 'gecekondu' has been changed in its use. In the beginning (1945) it has been a solution to the problem of sheltering. But in the 'globalisation' period it is a means of speculation. It has got a new form, which is an apartment. Former 'gecekondu' buildings' which were in special locations, with gardens and in green, turned to 'apartment like' 'gecekondu' buildings in order to be used as an investment. (Slides) Accordingly, the habitants of slums who were naive initially have undergone a dramatic change in time leading to social discrepancies or even social injuries. People are attending to seize land and to sell it to the immigrants who need it. So it has turned to become a way of making money which is not legal.⁶

Another important point in the dramatic change of 'gecekondu' is its misuse. As the new laws and regulations do not allow new development plans or constructions, in Bosphorus or in some old parts of the city (where lots of 'gecekondu' buildings had been built) old 'gecekondu' buildings started to be sold for high expenses to people of higher incomes and unfortunately these buildings started to be reconstructed (turning to big high-income housings) under the mask of renovation. (Slides: Bosphorus)

On the other hand some firms work for the housing needs of the middle classes. Huge settlements with high apartment buildings which are 'self-sufficient' are some typical examples of this demand. The settlements filled the private areas around the city with their own shopping, recreation, education and even working possibilities. (Slides: Ataşehir, Bahçeşehir Settlements)

One of the most important issues of this process in housing has been some settlements which aim to be isolated from the rest of the society. Some typical architectural elements have been symbols for them; especially swimming pools, private guards, landscaping projects and technical security equipments.(Slides)

This developments are not only seen in Istanbul, but as well as in some other cities during the period of 'globalisation'. Some universal features and typologies have been brought. (Slides: Kemer Country, Alkent, Alsit Housings)

⁶ Şahinler, Deniz "Why User Participation in Developing Countries:", Book of Proceedings for the Housing Conference in Helsingor- Denmark, 1996.

V. CONCLUSION

Despite all the complex problems one is facing in Istanbul, it is yet possible to define reliable elements for hope. Hope for architecture beyond individual interest. Hope that there is an order beginning to emerge out of this devastating situation. One which is to do with the understanding of relationship of our individual lives and the life that we play in the social stage.

At this point, architects are responsible for making a decision as the professional group responsible for the environment. It is a choice which requires decision making

In the process of technological design which interrogates and redefines the given conditions by adopting traditional roles, by continuing to produce places in the framework of symbols, objects and given conditions, assuming responsibility in the direction of the benefit to the environment, society and individual in the most effective way, supporting cultural and administrative change for raising the quality and sustainability.

Although development and spreading of natural environment sensitivity and the notion of sustainability, are principally directly dependent on circles of interest like trade, industry and politics sources of power, architects can make a very important thrusting power for realising the required change by conceiving the problems and change correctly, utilising new and traditional technologies correctly, re-educating employers and users with this conscious and above all realising convincing choices within their fields of activity, and in the end they can put forth singular but very valuable efforts that will make difference.

David Vann thinking that architects have a wide field of activity in spite of commercial and political besieging of architects, shows lack of information as one of the most important reasons of natural environment devastation and states that bad design is responsible for a large part of environmental problems, in his book called Biologic. Today, architects are required to revise their approaches to environmental problems which the area of design is directly involved. While designing an artificial environment producing pollution more than the planet can clean, the discussions of style and tectonic effect handled independently from these problems are in the lightest expression, is meaningless.

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