IMPACT OF KITSCH ON URBAN IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY ON TRABZON CITY

KİTSCH KAVRAMININ KENT KİMLİĞİNE ETKİLERİ: TRABZON KENTİ ÖRNEĞİ

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ABSTRACT

The first image that comes to mind when the name of a city is mentioned reflects the urban identity. Urban identity is formed over a long period of time, as a result of the relations between the buildings and between the buildings and their immediate environment and each other and due to a planned and sensitive development. Establishment of the city of Trabzon dates back to 2000 BC, and it is one of the rate cities in history that has attracted a global attention at every epoch due to its location. Its location at the most vital juncture on the silk road between Europe and Asia, the fact that it hosted several civilizations throughout history helped the city of Trabzon to acquire an urban identity and gain a privileged status. However, the industrial and demographical developments that accompanied industrialization have affected Trabzon similar to all urban areas and have resulted in radical urban changes. The city, which was unprepared for such a change was negatively affected and it began to lose its identity. The relationship between 'kitsch', also known as degenerate taste' and false aesthetics', and the society and environment and its impact on the urban identity of Trabzon is identified as the research problem. In the present study, the concept of "kitsch" was scrutinized as a consequence and an indicator of popular culture and de-identification and its impact on culture, identity and the city of Trabzon were discussed.

Keywords: Urban identity, the city of Trabzon, kitsch, culture.

ÖZ

Bir kentin adı anıldığında akla gelen ilk imaj kent kimliğinin bir yansımasıdır. Uzun bir zaman diliminde sadece yapılarla değil, yapıların çevreleri ve birbirleriyle ilişkileri üzerinden kent kimliği, aynı zamanda planlı ve duyarlı gelişimin sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Kuruluşu M.Ö. 2000'li yıllara dayanan Trabzon konumu itibariyle tarihin bütün evrelerinde tüm dünyanın ilgisini çekmiş ender kentlerden biridir. Avrupa ile Asya'nın ipek yolu üzerindeki en önemli irtibat noktasında bulunması, değişik medeniyetlere ev sahipliği yapması Trabzon'u ayrıcalıklı kılan ve kimlik kazanmasına neden olan etkenlerin başında gelmektedir. Ancak sanayileşme ile beraber gelen endüstriyel ve demografik gelişmeler, tüm kentleri olduğu gibi Trabzon'u da etkilemiş, kentte köklü değişiklikler yaratmıştır. Bu değişime hazır olmayan kent de olumsuz şekilde etkilenmiş ve kimliğini yitirmeye başlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kent kimliği, Trabzon, kitsch, kültür

1. INTRODUCTION

The city is vitalized by the resident individuals and expresses itself thorough their language and practices. In this perspective, the urban identity is defined as an eloquent gemeinschaft with unique features in different scales and interpretations in every city, which is shaped by physical, cultural, socio-economic, historical and formal factors and created by the urbanites and their lifestyle, and continuously developing, sustainable process expanding to the future (Lynch, 1960; Tekeli, 1991; Koyuncu, 2013).

The most significant elements that constitute the urban identity are environmental and structural factors. The urban topography, microclimate, natural structure, vegetation and animal species constitute the urban natural environment. The structural and architectural elements constitute the cultural heritage of the city and provide an urban identity in cities with thousands of years of history such as Trabzon. The fabric of the urban streets (cul de sacs, squares, topographical harmony, etc.), panoramic viewpoints, vista points, monumental structure are the environmental elements that influence the urban identity. However, urban identity should be defined with the socio-cultural characteristics of the urban society as well as the structural and environmental

characteristics of the city. Because, the urban identity is meaningful and valuable only through the experiences it provides. Thus, the concepts of 'culture' and 'tradition' are also significant for the recognition of urban identity. Lefebvre (1996) stated that the various spatial modes of production express different social and creative organizations, thus, the social identity is formed, and a change in the production and culture of a society would cause a change in the spatial production.

Development and modernization efforts have led different subcultures within national borders towards a national synthesis, while the population movements, urbanization, industrialization, and class fragmentation caused by development constantly change, unite and divide cultural boundaries (Steward, 1948). Perceptibility increases when the existential space (cognitive structure and processes) and the structural space are aligned. Alienation and de-identification begin when the abovementioned alignment is not achieved (Schulz, 1971).

In brief, urban identity could change based on identity elements formed by the natural and constructed environment, spatial elements, history, culture, geography, vegetation, climate, geopolitical position, architecture, economic level, social, political, ethnic, religious structure, life style, worldview of these factors, hosted civilizations, whether the city was the capital of these civilizations, relationships with other cultures, experienced occupations, wars, disasters etc., thus, developing a unique character (Lynch, 1960, Ocakçı, 1994, Ocakçı and Southworth, 1995, Suher et al., 1996, Önem and Kılınçaslan, 2005, Koyuncu, 2013).

Today, the cities experience common increasing problems. Especially in developing countries such as Turkey, rapid population growth, dense housing demand emerging as a result of urban migration became the reasons for unplanned construction and several infrastructural problems. In rapid construction activities, interest concerns and the inefficiency of local governments have led to practices that would harm the natural and historical urban environment. The changes experienced at environmental level has also affected social structure, creating socio-cultural problems. All these factors have led to the problem of loss of the urban identity.

2. TRABZON URBAN IDENTITY

Historians assume that the city of Trabzon was established around 2000 BC, and the city attracted the attention of several peoples such as Greek colonists, Persians, Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans due to its geographical location on important trade routes, and the city was dominated by various political establishments.

Trabzon was established at the beginning of the transit route to Asia and the Middle East and is the oldest and largest port city on the Black Sea coast. The foundation of the city is associated with two factors. The first is the fact that the location facilitated the connection between Eastern Black Sea region to the hinterland and the second is that the areas is a natural harbor that could provide shelter for small ships towards the Boztepe slopes and protected from the westerly winds by Yoroz Cape and Güzel Hisar rock formation. Trabzon, the oldest and largest harbor city on the Black Sea coast, has dominated the eastern trade and was at the center of attention of western traders, who wanted to trade with the east through the Silk Road as a location where Middle and Near Eastern goods are exhibited and shipped (Zorlu et al., 2010).

The city of Trabzon was settled on ridges, which are separated by the steep streams that run towards the sea. The ridge on which the city is settled is cut by streams such as Degirmendere, Tabakhane Stream and Zaganos Stream which descend towards the seashore and ascend starting from the seashore via numerous grades. Further behind, three kilometers southeast is Boztepe Hill with a steep slope and flat back, where the city of Trabzon rests against. To the further west of Boztepe is Soğuksu Hill. The city of Trabzon city extends its neighborhoods to the northern slopes of these hills with an altitude of over 200 meters, starting from the spaces where the slopes are manageable, up until the low cliffs like an amphitheater. Except the port section, the main urban mass remains on top of the cliffs and does not have direct contact with the sea (Yilmaz, 2006).

Trabzon is an important example of cities established based on defense and topographical conditions. The city, where the problem defense is solved by the ramparts located around the hill, has three significant areas of historical settlement. These are the settlements known as Lower Tower, Middle Tower and Upper Tower. Trabzon continued to be an important urban center with its unique identity throughout the history with its significant architectural heritage (churches, mosques, inns, Turkish baths, schools, streets, squares, etc.) and natural values outside the city walls. Several domestic and foreign travelers have visited the city and praised its name and became a subject of the memoirs of the famous travelers Marko Polo and Evliya Çelebi (Zorlu et al., 2010).

Trabzon has several symbolic features due to its natural, architectural and cultural structures that constitute its urban identity. The city has a rich cultural mosaic due to its nature, the lifestyle of its inhabitants, tradition and architecture. For example, traditional handicrafts (stonemasonry and woodcrafts, weaving, wickerwork, coppersmiths, cutlery, quilting, candlemakers, etc.), indigenous vegetables and fruits (cherry laurel, kale, persimmon), anchovy, folk dances, soccer team, tableland migration, tableland festivities, several architectural heritage buildings in and out of the city walls (inns, Turkish baths, mansions, monasteries and churches, mosques, schools, streets, squares, etc.), traditional tableland architecture, towers and natural elements are among the abovementioned symbolic features.

The past urban texture developed in harmony with the natural environment and based on the cultural structure is replaced with the contemporary urban texture shaped by economic and technological changes. It is inevitable that the 20th century developments would lead to a series of changes and transformations in the urban social structure and spaces (Bilsel, 2002). When the historical developments are considered, it could be observed that in every period, societies reflect their experiences and ideas on the space. Thus, it is necessary to consider the changes and transformations in modern urban spaces that were shaped by economic and technological change as a part of the contemporary urban identity, although the consequences are not positive in many instances (Deniz Topçu, 2011). Contemporary cities are different from the old traditional texture and reflect the newly developed urban identity on physical spaces. Each city, each period has a different identity, but as it is the case in several Anatolian cities, Trabzon is facing an identity problem, physical, social and cultural degeneration created by the urbanization dynamics that accelerated after 1950's.

3. KITSCH AND IDENTITY

Today, a look at social life would show that it is difficult to develop satisfaction and taste. Irregular structures, advertising signs without esthetics, display windows, environmental designs that lack green areas, or common sculptures that are thought to serve urban aesthetics are creating a visual pollution. These environmental views that are inevitable to ignore, in fact, reflect our societal aesthetic preferences and the resulting urban identity that we live in.

The roots of the word kitsch are uncertain. Some argue that it originated in the English word "Sketch", according to others, it comes from the German "Kitschen" meaning "hoarding". However, the word "Kitsch" is not used in the same sense today. "The concept used to identify artifacts that extend bad taste to ridiculous and strange extremes " is used to reflect products that have an aesthetic effect on people who consume it (watch, view, listen, read, look at), however that could not be considered as art. The term, used to describe a distasteful, rootless, and aesthetically worthless design concept, especially found in various objects produced in the 20th century, is preferred to specify low aesthetics in the broad sense ranging from graphical to industrial design and architectural structures (STS, 2010; Mamur, 2012). Particularly in the 18th century, the disintegration of the ideas of the monarchical era, the attempts of this culture to construct products with the old formal approach for the new age of technology created the disparity called kitsch. Especially the lack of the levels of identity and culture required to grasp the conception of the new age has become a source for kitsch (Turani, 2003).

In developing countries, social change and the quest for new norms cause these countries to create their own kitsch, while at the same time these countries import the kitsch created by developed countries (Yardımcı, 2002). In fact, according to Greenberg, kitsch was not limited to the cities where it was born, but it moved to the periphery and destroyed the popular identity and culture in these areas. Moreover, the expansion is not limited by geographical and national boundaries. Western industrialization caused kitsch to surround and disintegrate indigenous cultures and caused these cultures to lose their identity (Yılmaz, 2004).

With the kitsch created by modernity and globalization, not only the functions of the cities but also the urban and urbanite identity are undergoing transformation. Thus, cities become the spaces of similarity through multiplication and diversification, they are no longer a space for unique differences like they were in the past.

According to the definitions on urban identity, it is clear that similar to the unique identity, features and personality of each individual, cities have their unique identities and personalities as well (Tekeli, 1991). However, kitsch is used to describe a construct, a phenomenon that is reduced to popular taste, is 'cheap', 'purchasable', 'popular', easy to produce and consume, with a superficial perception, with commercial concerns, appealing to all, impersonal, and without an identity.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Within the scale of new values created by modernity and globalization, not only the functions of the cities but also the urban identity and the identity of the urbanites are undergoing transformation. Thus, cities become the spaces of similarity through multiplication and diversification, they are no longer a space for unique differences like they were in the past.

In the cities of the 21st century, local integrity has been disintegrated and non-existent (Robins, 1999). Since the 1970s and 1980s, public spaces have been reshaped into different forms, including shopping malls, theme parks, supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, etc. and became common along with the concepts of consumerism and kitsch that were shaped especially by the middle-upper and middle class lifestyle. Parallel to these developments, in the city of Trabzon, public spaces, squares, residential areas, bazaars, beaches have changed and urban identity has been negatively affected.

Trabzon, which is both a historical and a coastal city, has preserved its urban identity in a large extent thanks to the original design by the French urban planner Lambert in 1937. However, due to the ongoing transportation problem in the city, the constructed tangent road that caused savage urban destruction in the historical city center during the 2000s and Black Sea Coastal Road completed in 2007, the coastal city features of Trabzon were destroyed.

The Black Sea Coastal Road was constructed on reclaimed land along the narrow coastal strip, which was considered to be an economical and rapid solution. The Black Sea Coastal Road Project ignored the coastal settlements and the fact that these settlements constituted coastal cities and the pedestrian access from these settlements to the shoreline and even the visual connection have been completely disrupted. Throughout the Black Sea coast, the frequent green cover and small coves where the green cover met the sea along the coast disappeared and as a result, the whole space was transformed into a transit speed highway where long-haul trucks and cars cruise (Zorlu et al., 2010). In the coastal area of Trabzon, 930 ha were reclaimed in the 40-year period between 1975 and 2013 and most occurred during the last decades (post-2000). Çölkesen and Sesli (2007) demonstrated in their study that significant changes took place in the coastal areas in Trabzon province in the process that started with the construction of the Black Sea Coastal Road. In the city of Trabzon, it was observed that reclaimed areas removed the access routes to the sea and the human-sea contact, and the sea became merely a visual element for urbanites to enjoy. The positioning of beaches within the context of natural coastal morphology away from the urban center revealed the negative pressures of water pollution and reclamations on the sea and the coastal area (Özdemir Işık and Demirel, 2014). The coastal road constructed on the reclaimed land has also destroyed the natural urban coastline; the centuries old natural beauty of the Ganita, Kemerkaya, Moloz, Sotha, Faroz and Uzunkum beaches and living culture were destroyed. Although it could be considered that the conversion of coastal areas into future catering areas could increase the coastal use, unplanned kitsch buildings have adversely affected the utilization and transport potential on the coastline.

The Tangent Road, constructed in 2002, passed through the city walls at the middle of Ortahisar, which is registered as an archeological site that borders Tabakhane and Zaganos valleys, and caused damages to the castle which is one of the most important symbols of Trabzon. It has also damaged the texture of the ancient city by destroying several historical buildings that were located where the viaduct piers were constructed on its path. However, today, within the context of the Zaganos Valley Urban Transformation Project, the slums in the area are being demolished and the green valleys are supposed to replace these areas as envisaged in the Lambert Plan. But the Tangent Road, which can be considered kitsch, also overshadows these plans. The road crosses the historical city center, passing through the south of the historic city square, which has witnessed several important events, celebrations as a center of social life in the history of the city and even utilized as a hippodrome in the past, disrupting the urban identity.

The Taksim square, which is significant for the identity of the city of Trabzon, also functioned as a square in the historical process from 1900's to present day. The survival of the historical structural characteristics in the Taksim square is a gain. The Atatürk monument, which was erected in the square in the 1950s, is also still present in the square today. The circular pool that was constructed in the 50's, and the people who sat around the pool chatting are replaced with small, rectangular pools and squirters that attract children's attention today. Taksim square was exposed to physical interventions in different periods and was less protected according to the general preservation criteria. Again, the Şems hotel, one of the best hotels in the city center, the fountain right on the front and Sümer movie theater that was located on the northwest corner of the square since late 1950's no longer exist. Back then, when you looked towards the Boztepe Ramp from the Taksim Square,

Sümer movie theater used to shine with its impeccable architecture, while today, only the kitsch Tangent Road that is an element of visual pollution is visible. The destruction of these buildings damaged the historical continuity and identity of the Taksim square and its immediate surroundings. Suluhan is a semi-closed inn which survived until the 1980's. It was demolished in the late 1980's and a kitsch that disrupts the skyline of the square and serves as a business center was built in its place (Doğan, 2016).

Trabzon's historic Kemeraltı bazaar has also served as a shopping bazaar from the past until today. However, today, disappearance of copper trade and coppersmiths caused the bazaar to lose its identity. Although the shopping activity still continues in the bazaar, it could be observed that shopping quality and the culture of the users that the activity attracts decreased and kitsch shops increased and the historical fabric is lost.

One of the kitsch buildings that affect the Trabzon skyline negatively, cause adverse reactions and influence the urban identity adversely is the stereotypical TOKİ buildings. Stereotypical built environment has an adverse impact on the historical urban center, architectural heritage and the fabric, scale and identity of the city. When the skyline of mass housing implemented by TOKİ in different districts of the city is examined, the lack of architectural approach, the uniformity and mass urban parts whose several aspects are open to discussion are prevalent. Due to the problems experienced in samples built abroad social housing typology is abandoned worldwide, however it has been implemented in building blocks that have been rising in every urban environment in Turkey, creating an urban transformation that needs to be addressed comprehensively (Gür, 2009). These are the examples of contemporary urban kitsch. Cities are no longer only living and production areas but also areas of image and consumption full of kitsch.

In contemporary Trabzon, residential areas have also changed and there has been a noticeable increase in condominiums, residences and hotels. Especially after 2004, the increasing demand by the urban elites for a safe and respectable environment has made this new type of self-sufficient residences with social facilities, shopping center, swimming pool, tennis courts, carpet or grass soccer fields, cultural activity areas, etc. These buildings that are widespread in Şana-Kaşüstü region host individuals that are not homogenous with respect to their target market, business fields, occupations, income sources, education levels, but homogenous in their financial and cultural capital. These kitsch buildings, which do not possess any unique character that could refer to the indigenous culture based on their architectural features, albeit they promote the neighborhood culture and past neighbor relations in their marketing strategies, their only common denominator is the purchase of a certain image. They do not seem to have too much of a flexibility that is outside of the stereotype mass and environmental relations brought about by the density. These kitsch buildings result in the distancing of the sheltered urban spaces from each other and other living areas of the city (Alver, 2010).

In conclusion, the kitsch buildings, which we refer to with the adjectives of unqualified and worthless, started to exist in our living space, in our environment and in our cities, and will continue to exist as they did in the past due to economic, political, cultural and artistic dynamics. From the perspective of urban identity, in Turkey which is equipped with a unique history, cultural and architectural heritage, differentiation of the cities and the kitsch is a significant problem that needs to be solved.

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