Whose Space, Whose Culture? Struggle for Cultural Representation in »French Street« of Istanbul

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»I think this project (›French Street‹ Project) will be very important for our country, which is on the way to European Union, (this project is) especially (important) for Istanbul, which was the capital of the empires, as well as for Beyoğlu district, which has been the our city's window to Europe for centuries in terms of architecture and culture.« (Gürtuna 2002)

Ali Müfit Gürtuna was city mayor of Istanbul between 1998 and 2004. His statement above is an excerpt of an official letter sent to Mehmet Taşdiken's real estate agency in 2002, supporting the implementation the »French Street« cultural theme project in Istanbul/Beyoğlu.

The area of the mentioned project includes houses and public spaces of Cezayir Sokağı and Hayriye Çıkmazı, situated in the inner city district of Beyoğlu. »French Street« is a particularly interesting study case as it represents the first »thematic street project of Turkey« (Afitaş 2006:13). Since its reconstruction in 2004 this locality is commonly known as »French Street« as its development concept attempts to establish French culture in the traditionally non-Muslim, mainly Greek (Mills 2005), neighborhood.

Twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to imagine that Istanbul's public authority would support the redevelopment of an entire street based on a European identity. The nationalist identity model of the Turkish Republic, which still existed in the early 80s, maintained inward-oriented perspectives in urban planning. But since Turkey's politi-

cal re-orientation, in the 1980s, towards neo-liberal policies and internationalization of economic activities, the representation of urban culture and identity in the public domain has changed. As in many other countries, the impacts of globalization have affected urban development patterns and every-day life in Turkey (Öncü 1997; Short/Kim 1999; Eckardt 2001).

Related developments can be observed not just in Istanbul, but in many big cities around the world. International franchise companies, such as Starbucks or H&M sell their standardized products in prestigious parts of inner cities. Multi-screen cinemas show international movies, introducing different approaches to culture and lifestyle. Exhibitions and festivals bring globally known artists and musicians to regional and local places. Whether its new food, movies, music or clothes, that are introduced in the globalization process, their presences become a coherent part of urban landscapes in metropolises all over the world. They attest to a new global interconnectivity, not just in terms of business and goods, but of people and information, too.

The movement of ideologies, culture and goods, and the simultaneous powerful representation of their symbols through the media often appear to delete local identities of place. The same consumer products, brand names, and media images are spread around the globe. Chinatown in New York, Argentinean Tango in Berlin, French Cuisine in Istanbul or Christmas in Japan: nowadays it seems nearly impossible to link cultural practices to a specific place, or as Urry (2004: 57) states:

»The ideological content of western mass culture has spread around the globe. Its aim is to ensure an ever-expanding (western) economy by extending the consumption patterns of the affluent society to all other places. Through Hollywood movies, Disney's fantasy parks, and satellite television, a culture based on consumption now establishes a global hegemony.«

But according to Öncü/Weyland (1997: 8) this process is not the same as the homogenization of cultures. In fact, they claim, that globalization is a multilayered process rather than a unified phenomenon reflecting American and therewith Western cultural domination. Although most of the global traffic is one-way, cross current development can be recognized as well. Short/Kim (1999: 76) use the word »Reterritorialization«, while Hannerz (1997: 127) employed the term »Creolization« to describe the cross-current process. In this regard, big cities have become a reservoir of diverse cultural practices including ethnicity, language and religion, influenced by symbols, ideas, values and tastes from all over the world. Thus, cultural backgrounds are not just understood as empty

containers for the receipt of global messages, rather they are critical of how messages are received and consumed. De-territorialized cultures are re-territorialized in different forms in new localities (Short/Kim 1999:76).

In these globalized landscapes, urban development strategies in many cities try to underline local histories, cultures, and quirks in an effort to demonstrate what makes them different from other places, what makes them unique. Generally speaking, the reinvention of local idiosyncrasies is part of nearly every current urban development strategy. It includes historic preservation of inner city neighborhoods or the marketing of local products and services that mainly cater to tourists or highly paid individuals. Often financed by private, market oriented investors this »local« development has lead to the emergence of urban spaces with specific cultural characteristics. Frequently, only a selective public is welcome to participate in the commercial and cultural consumption of these spaces.

This paper is mainly concerned with the cultural transformation of these public spaces. Crucial points of discussion and questions this paper asks include the following: How is the local culture transformed within the global economy? Which histories and cultures are considered appropriate for representation in urban spaces and why? How do the powers and requirements of urban actors influence that process?

With the recent political reorientation in Turkey, Beyoğlu, an Istanbul neighborhood, with its diversified cultural roots, is an important case study. The questions I discuss in this paper are essential and add meaning to the current debate regarding the development of public spaces in Istanbul. My goal, therefore, is not to reiterate the debate on worldwide cultural homogenization, or simply to describe a specific case of representing French cultural roots in a locality, but is to investigate the interconnection of global trends, their local responses and to examine the power laden structures behind that process. Using the »French Street« case study, I will examine the role played by Istanbul's public authorities, private investors, and the media in the planning, implementation and maintenance processes of this project.

The first section of this paper will briefly contextualize the case study area by turning to Istanbul's historical development and analyzing the Ottoman and Republican periods and their connection to European identity models. This is important as the »French Street« urban planning project's concept aims to reconstitute European cultural practices. Furthermore particular attention will be paid to the social and political changes after the 1980s embedding the case study in its current context. The third part of the paper gives an in-depth analysis of the development

and implementation process of the French Street project paying special attention to the urban actors involved. Finally, I will provide concluding remarks by linking the French Street case study to the broader theoretical debate.[1]

Contextualization: Istanbul

Istanbul is not just the biggest city in Turkey, but also one of the most populated cities in the world. In 2006 Istanbul's population reached more than 10 million[2], its settlement area extending more than 100 kilometers in an east-west direction along the Marmara Sea. Today Istanbul is also a dominant economic center in the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia, and therefore attracts significant global capital (Seger/Palencsar 2003; Robins/Aksoy 1995; Keyder/Öncü 1994).

Furthermore the city is a popular tourist destination and hosts international film, theatre, jazz and art festivals. Since the late 90s, the »Biennale«, a large cultural festival that takes place in Istanbul every two years, has been an important platform for the city to exhibit its history. In 2007 the ninth Biennale was simply named »Istanbul« – a consciously blurry title. The title encompasses a plethora of things imaginable in Istanbul, but primarily refers to the real urban location of the festival and points to stories and metaphors inspired by the city (http://universes-in-universe.de 2007). And there are plenty of these stories. They tell tales about different cultures, ethnically and religiously diverse groups, they portray lifestyles and habits and speak about tensions and hopes; they define the everyday life in the city. In their diversity, the Istanbul stories emphasize the confrontation of contemporary Istanbul with its layered story of the past and present. In the following paragraphs I will introduce some of these telling layers.

A capital of the East-Roman and the Ottoman Empire for nearly 2000 years, Istanbul was one of the most important cities in the world until the beginning of the twentieth century (Seufert/Kubaseck 2004). After Byzantine Constantinople (later Istanbul) was conquered by the Ottoman forces in 1453, a large Greek community continued to live in

1 The presented article is the result of examinations on Istanbul carried out during the year 2006 and 2007. Besides a profound analysis of relevant publications and media, the study mainly bases its conclusions on a 3-month fieldwork by the author in Istanbul that consisted of space observations and interviews with private and public stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the French Street Project.

2 Census referring to city borders without independent suburbs.

the city after Mehmet, the Ottoman Conqueror, granted a perpetual right for the patriarchate to remain in the city. Since the Ottoman Empire was not based on the succession of aristocracy, but on the principle of efficiency, Greeks continued to play a significant role in the social and economic city life. Even after the Greek independence movement and the establishment of an independent Greek state in 1829, Istanbul remained the largest Greek Orthodox city throughout the Ottoman Empire (Keyder 1999: 8; Seufert/Kubaseck 2004: 66). »Ottoman Istanbul was no less cosmopolitan than Byzantine Constantinople« (Keyder 1999: 9), as it maintained a mix of ethnic and religious communities.

With the beginning of European expansion in the nineteenth century that was accompanied by top-down modernization attempts by the Ottoman State, local Muslims sought to find new »symbols of resistance« and began to import nationalist ideologies. Istanbul became the arena where critical oppositions – East versus West, Islam versus Christianity, and local versus global – were played out as Keyder (1999:9) states.

In this atmosphere the Ottoman Empire finally collapsed in the aftermath of the World War I. Fueled by the desire to found a Greek nation state in which the Balkans and Anatolia, including Istanbul would be settled by the Greeks, the Greek government started a campaign against the weakened Ottoman Empire. These developments mobilized the Turkish national movement, which led to the Turkish War of Independence from 1919-1922. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Greeks suffered a devastating defeat and the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923. These developments had serious consequences for the Greeks living in Turkey and furthermore for the ethnic structure of traditionally multi-ethnic Istanbul. In the Treaty of Lausanne, a forced population exchange was agreed, resulting in the deportation of 1.25 Million Greeks and 500, 000 Turks (Human Rights Watch 1990). The significance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate Church in Istanbul for the Greek Orthodoxy played an important role in allowing the exemption of Istanbul's Greek population from this mass deportation. Nonetheless, supported by the former anti-western movements, it was easy to dismiss the city's predominantly non-Muslim pro-western population. The new regime under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, however, remained sceptical to this oppositional model, which was characterized by an adherence to Islam. Consequently, from the Republican point of view, the ideal local cultural concept was »fiercely irreligious, embodying all the virtues of tradition without its vices, ready and willing to be injected with positivism and progress« (Keyder 1999:10). Istanbul, as the center of the traditional political system and deeply entrenched in Islam, thus lost its status as capital city to Ankara. The new capital also

became the new center of secular, rational and enlightened politics (Robins/Aksoy 1995).

The new Turkish nation state was very nationalistic and its constitution contained more ethnic references than democratic ones. In order to create a homogenous sense of national identity, immigrants were only welcome if they were either Muslim and could speak Turkish, or officially belonged to an ethnic group that could easily integrate into Turkish culture, such as Albanians or Bosnians (Kirisci 2007).

In the beginning of the 20th century 56% of Istanbul's population consisted of religious or ethnic minorities, such as Christians and Jews. These people were not just an integral part of the city's everyday life, moreover, as merchants, businessmen or shopkeepers they played an important role in Istanbul's international trading connections (Mills 2005:446; Keyder 1999: 11). In the Istanbul of the Turkish Republic these people were no longer warmly welcome. Anti-Christian minority policy drove nearly all of Istanbul's non-Muslim population out of the city. (Seufert/Kubaseck 2004: 87). In 1923 foreign enterprises had to force their Christian employees to resign, in 1936 the state started to take over churches and in 1942 a newly invented property tax left nearly all of the non-Muslim merchants in ruins (Seufert/Kubaseck 2004:161). In 1955 a government-instigated pogrom against Istanbul's Greek population living in Pera around Istiklal Caddesi took place. Eleven people were murdered and more than 600 were injured. During one night more than 72 orthodox churches were set on fire, more than 3500 Greek owned homes and more than 4000 Greek-owned businesses were badly damaged or attacked. Consequently more than 100,000 non-Muslim minorities left the country (ÖRKÖ 2005). Again in 1964 demonstrations motivated people with Greek citizenship to leave the country (Keyder 1999:11). Thus by the 1980s, Istanbul's Greek population had been reduced to fewer than 2000, Armenians to 50,000 and Jews to 25,000, compared to a total Christian population of about 450,000 in 1914. (Mills 2005: 446; Keyder 1999: 11).

In 1983 the newly elected ANAP government introduced the neoliberal political model in Turkey, replacing the inward-looking development policies of former governments. The large amounts of foreign trade and foreign direct investments received by Turkey are a clear indicator of the successful adoption of the new political model. Between 1980 and 2001 foreign investment experienced a twenty-eight fold increase reaching 2.7 billion dollars in 2001. In the same period, imports saw a fivefold increase from 7.9 to 41.4 billion dollars and exports a tenfold increase from 2.9 to 31.3 billion dollars (Islam 2001:125).

In this period Istanbul became the new showcase for international and national investments (Keyder/Öncü 1994:400). A huge variety of projects were initiated with the primary aim of transforming Istanbul »from a national primate city ravaged by rapid immigration into a newly imagined world city« (Keyder/Öncü 1994: 401). Especially under mayor Dalan, investment friendly projects were designed »to enhance the global image of Istanbul« (Keyder/Öncü 1994: 401) as a western and cosmopolitan city, ready to overtake its symbolic bridgehead position between the East and West, between Orient and Occident (Keyder/Öncü 1994; Robins/Aksoy 1995).

The new global interconnectivity allowed Istanbulians, especially highly paid and well educated individuals, to adapt to western consumption patterns and values. Accordingly, the rise of shopping malls, like Akmerkez and Kanyon, selling luxury goods; international brands like Starbucks, Mc Donald's, and Gucci; and of bars, nightclubs and world cuisine restaurants, revealed the emergence of new lifestyles. Istanbul was rapidly becoming a city of cultural consumption (Keyder 1999: 17), geared not just to its population, but to tourists as well; »[…] it is through the tourist's gaze that Istanbulites have come to realize the profundity of their loss: the disappearance of 2000 years of history«, as Öncü states, »the exotic beauty of the city's old neighborhoods, the romanticism of its indigenous wooden architecture, and the splendor of its historical monuments« (1997: 56).

Apart from these developments, the economic boom and open borders attracted an influx of working immigrants especially from the East Anatolian provinces and the Eastern Bloc. Istanbul's population increased rapidly from 2,7 mill. (1980) to 10 mill. (2006). The newcomers either »invaded« the abandoned inner city sites of the non-Muslim population or moved to informal settlements *gecekondus*, inhabited by cultural homogenous groups of immigrants with their own social networks based on kinship and local origin. Networking became an integral characteristic of Istanbul's development structures, be it in terms of business associations, political organizations or social activities (Erder 1999: 165). But still, the immigrant's religious and ethical values and therefore their claims to the city differ considerably from the elite and the well educated middle class. This unevenness has the capacity to ignite cultural conflicts, arising around the definitions of locality and identity similar to Keyder's (1999: 23) »modern-traditional« clash. These tensions and conflicts are part of Istanbul's urban development.

Öncü summarized the diverse and contradictory nature of Istanbul's new coexistence effectively: »In the 1980s, when the inhabitants of Istanbul were introduced to Mc Donald's hamburgers, Toblerone choco-

late and Italian pizza, they also got to know hamsili kebab, the taste of Kayseri manit, red cabbage, and the distinct flavors of Urfa, Antep and Bursa kebabs« (1993: 75). Under the impacts of globalization a sense locality specific to Istanbul has regained its former cultural diversity. In this way, immigrant's cultural origins are suddenly on display, while the emerging internationally spread lifestyles defined by western values of a globalizing city are easily recognized. At the same time, however, conflicts arise between the polarized groups, between the localizers and the globalizers (Keyder 1999: 23), who each have different attitudes and claims to the city. It is these conflicts that are ready to be played out in the public spaces of the city. After the election of the pro Islamic Welfare party in the 1990s, the question of what is native or local culture and what is being reformulated as local after years of westernization, is highly contested (Navaro-Yasin 1999: 61-63).

»French Street«: Representing history?

The case study area of »French Street« consists of two public streets, Cezayir Sokağı and Hayriye Çıkmazı. Cezayir Sokağı means Algerian Street respectively. Additionally, the adjoining 29 three to six storied 19th century buildings, and a small square are also part of the French Street redevelopment project. The project was initiated by Afitaş, a private real estate agency owned by Mehmet Taşdiken. He developed his ideas with support from the public authorities. Despite Taşdiken's connection to the public authorities, the project was initiated in 2004 without any governmental financial support.

Figure 1 and 2: French Street's appearance: Most of the newly renovated buildings house restaurants and bars, Restaurant seating and luminous advertising characterize the public space. Photos by Susanne Prehl, 2006

Today the newly renovated pastel painted buildings with colorful awnings, mostly house restaurants and bars, serving French food. Furthermore there are shops, an art gallery, and a hotel, while some of the upper floors are still used for living. The street's public space is characterized by high volumes of restaurant seating which reduces the effective walkable width of the street to one and a half meters. Moreover, the area is »furnished« by luminous advertising and street lamps that have been manufactured according to an old Parisian design (The guide 2005: 67). A large mural painting – a copy of the artwork »Jane Avril« by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec – decorates the most visible façade.

Whose space?

The area of »French Street« is part of Beyoğlu, an inner-city neighborhood on Istanbul's European shore. The project itself is situated right behind Galatasaray School close to the Istiklal Caddesi – Istanbul's new center and main boulevard. This area is a prospering district, known for its restaurants, bars and art galleries. But Beyoğlu is not just a gentrified leisure, entertainment, and art center. Since Ottoman times the district hosted foreign embassies, international organizations, and serves as a residence for Istanbul's non-Muslim inhabitants. Beyoğlu, formerly known as Pera, was founded as a Genoese trading colony that was granted autonomy by the Empire in the thirteenth century. The colony inhabited the unsettled European side of the river bank, while the existing Imperial City was located on the other side of the river. In the beginning of the nineteenth century native minorities, including mercantile Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Levantines moved to Pera.

In 1889 the first Orient Express reached Istanbul from Paris. But it was not the first time that Beyoğlu was introduced to French culture. Moreover the area around Istiklal Caddesi was already known as the French speaking financial and entertainment center of the city, designated by the Ottomans as a reform area to transform Istanbul into a »Western City«. Characterized by a wealth of languages and cultural practices, and being less connected to the religious rules and social control of the Muslim society, Pera became the first »Europeanized« quarter of the city, dominated by symbols of modern living such as office buildings, banks, theatres, hotels, department stores, and multi-storey apartment buildings (Bartu 1999; Mills 2005).

The neighborhood still hosts various historic buildings that attest to Beyoğlu's multiethnic past, for instance religious facilities, such as the Santa Maria Draperis, Saint Antoine, the Armenian-Catholic Church, the

Aga-Mosque or the Greek Orthodox Church of Hagia Panalya can be found there. International hospitals like the German Hospital or schools such as the Galatasaray Lycee or St. Plucherie still characterize the reputation of the district (Türkiye Sinai Kalkınma Bankası 1990).

Since the political and economical reconstruction in the 1980s, Beyoğlu is one of the main investment areas for national and international shareholders in Istanbul. Several urban regeneration projects, such as the closing of the Istiklal Caddesi Street to traffic have already occurred in Beyoğlu. Today it is a very prestigious, partly gentrified district that is carefully promoted to the world as Istanbul's cosmopolitan and western city center. Especially after 1994, when the pro-Islamic Welfare Party was elected as the local government, Beyoğlu's development has been celebrated as a symbol of tolerance; »For party officials it was a crucial opportunity to demonstrate the ›Ottoman Model‹ of government, which they defined as the coexistence of different lifestyles in peace and harmony« (Bartu 1999: 40).

However this multi-ethnic identity promotion neglects one important part of Beyoğlu's past, namely the forced decline of its cosmopolitan atmosphere, mainly caused by the anti-minority policy under the Turkish Republic, as described in the previous paragraph. As a result Beyoğlu where the non-Muslim minorities were concentrated lost most of its inhabitants and the multi-ethnic flair of its heyday at the end of the 19th century.

»French Street« used to be a Greek settlement (Mills 2005). Since the state-sponsored riot in 1955 against the Greek population and other non-Muslims, many houses were abandoned and had open land tenures. They were then informally populated by immigrants, especially Kurdish people from Anatolia or Gypsies that were not able to formally obtain the buildings (Mills 2005). Consequently »French Street's« housing stock visibly degenerated and served as home for the low income class until a private developer decided to place his project idea of a »French Street« in the area of Cezayir Sokağı Street. As a result of this decision, the immigrant culture of the neighborhood was confronted with the planned cultural concept of a glamorous Western lifestyle.

Whose culture?

The official »French Street« project report, written by Afitaş, considers the recovery of Turkey's relationship to European Culture to be the main purpose of the project. It argues that the French Street project could bring back European, namely French, culture to Beyoğlu. Therefore, the

former multiculturalism of the district was nostalgically (Mills 2005) introduced as one of the main characteristics of the Cezayir Street area. Primarily Afitaş, the real estate agency, and Istanbul's city mayor Gürtuna were supporter of the project. Similarly Afitaş announced in the report (2004):

»›French Street‹ Project is a transformation project in a social and cultural sense. For Turkey that is on the way to European Union and for Beyoğlu which accelerated in being culture-art and entertainment space, it is a project which will accelerate and give momentum to the transformation and civilization. […] This is a transformation project which will have great contributions on the multi-cultural life of Turkey. […] Moreover, this project will indirectly contribute to the world culture, peace and tolerance.«

Two years later the argumentation was still the same, and was published in the French Street Magazine by Afitaş: »[The] ›French Street‹ project expresses both the history of Beyoğlu and the history of the empire. Because in these lands a multiculture is born and […] supported by Ottoman itself. Firstly starting from Beyoglu, all of our ruined historical zones must reveal all our culture and memories.« [sic!] (Afitaş, 2006:11)

Thus the development model for Cezayir Street, introduced by the real estate agency, Afitaş, and encouraged by the public authorities, makes references to the quarter's history conveying through its architecture and design an »idealized« image of an elegant nineteenth century French speaking Grande Rue de Pera / Istiklal Caddesi (Mansel 1993). The idea behind the concept, concurrent with a nowadays Turkish passion for the Islamic and Ottoman past, draws a relationship with Istanbul's history as capital of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empires. In their historical representation, Afitaş chooses a period known for its prowestern and multiethnic aspects. By emphasizing a time period in which Istanbul opened its arms to the west and to multicultural influences, clear connections are made with today's globalizing Istanbul. Furthermore, the »French Street« project shares with other inner city rehabilitation projects, the task of »valuing« a poor neighborhood by enlisting private investment and by implementing popular entertainment and culture concepts. In the area of Cezayir Street the chosen concept of French identity is, according to Mills (2005), an invented one, as the area predominately used to be a Greek neighborhood.

Aiming to implement and promote the »French Street« project in a powerful way, the project's developer generated a French brand for Cezayir Sokağı, which represented how the street was transformed from

»an abandoned street with ruined appearance« to a lively street »reaching its own historical value« (Afitaş 2006: 13).

In its design »French Street« was thematically staged to create a »French flair« with pastel-colored walls, French paintings and furniture, as well as restaurants with French names playing French music and serving French food (Cumartesi VATAN 01/2004). Cultural events, such as concerts and exhibitions, also take place in several locations on the street. Furthermore a street magazine is published which contains articles about fashion, artists and lifestyle, thus catering to the interests of the street's target group, who are, as the street's director Taşdiken explains: »economically well situated and also culturally interested people« (2006). By implementing a French theme and by taking relatively high prices, the street management attracts a specific group of costumers that understands itself as modern and cosmopolitan elite, as Mills explains (2005):

»The emerging, self-consciously cosmopolitan-European identity of the cultural and economic elite in Istanbul builds on the secular and European part of Turkish national identity, while also deliberately contesting the nationalist narrative by undermining the definition of Turkey as an ethnically Turkish nation.« (Mills 2005:443)

Structures: Actors and power

Assisted by a team of architects, artists and scientists, Afitaş conceived the idea of »French Street« and presented the proposal to the city's municipality who quickly approved the project. As a result of his strong connections to the city's municipality, it is likely that Taşdiken, who was the consultant to Mayor Gürtuna at the time, played a decisive role in the projects approval.

The generally time-consuming process of approval, in the case of »French Street« took just a few days due to the fact that the project was accepted in one go. Approval included permission for renovation, demolition and reconstruction of the buildings, the termination of long term tenancy agreements of government owned buildings, and licenses and working permits for the restaurants (Interview French Street operator 2006; Beyoğlu Newspaper 07/2004: 5). However, the project's influential supporter – Istanbul's city mayor, Ali Müfit Gürtuna ensured its unusually quick approval process. In Istanbul's metropolitan governance system, the mayor's opinion has strong influence on the public decision making processes. His statement, citied at the beginning of this essay,

clearly shows that he identifies the »French Street« project as a means to reconnect Istanbul with its European cultural roots. The project's concept suited the governmental attempt to form a new »more modern and contemporary« composition for Beyoğlu by »protecting and respecting its former identity by highlighting traces of its past« (Beyoğlu Belediyesi 2006: 1). Employees of the city's municipality stated that they did not want to constrain private initiatives in the district (Büyükköksal/Özkan 2005). The incumbent mayor of the district of Beyoğlu was recently quoted in the »French Street« magazine: »That zone was in need of rehabilitation before, with this kind of a community it became an artistic place. […] I thank to (the) architects for this appendage they have done to our town. It's now time for all parts of Beyoğlu for similar projects.« (Afitaş, 2006:80)

Afitaş convinced its private business partners to invest and buy most of the houses in the »French Street« area and managed to get long-term tenancy agreements for government owned buildings. In order to realize the project, most of the former tenants were given notice to leave their flats. In total, 48 tenants moved to other settlement areas for low income populations [Yedikule, Tarlabaşı und Şişhane] (Büyükköksal & Özkan 2005). Today the houses in »French Street« are rented to new tenants who are often involved with operation of the restaurants and bars in the area.

During the project construction process, public opinion about the project was heavily influenced by the media. Just before and shortly after »French Street«'s opening, several supportive articles were published in newspapers, for instance: »A French wind in Beyoğlu« [Beyoğlu'nda Fransız rüzgarı] Cumhuriyet (2004); Radikal (2006); »Don't ignore French Street« [Fransız Sokağı'na Fransız kalmayın] Tempo (2004); »Beyoğlu gathered to its Paris in spring« [Beyoğlu baharda Paris'ine kavuşuyor] Vatan (2004) and in magazines: »French people come back to Pera. Pera collects its parts« [Fransızlar Pera'ya dönüyor. Pera parçalarını topluyor] (Beyoğlu newspaper 2003). A complimentarily magazine, The Guide – Istanbul, published for English speakers in Istanbul and distributed to hotels, advertising agencies etc. wrote about the »French Street« project:

»Beyoğlu is known for its handsome architecture but all too often old buildings are hidden under layers of grime accumulated over decades. One little corner of this historical district, which used to be known as Pera, has just regained its former splendour. In fact, the old Cezayir Sokağı, now known as Fransız Sokağı, is probably more attractive today than it has ever been, thanks to the efforts of developer Mehmet Taşdiken« (The Guide 2005:67). Thus

»French Street« appeared to be a warmly welcomed and widely supported project. But not all the reactions to the implementation of »French Street« were positive. The left leaning Postexpress published two interviews with former inhabitants of the neighborhood.

»Before, [›French Street‹] was a very lively street in many senses. There were Romani; I have witnessed at least 15 Romani wedding ceremonies. There were Kurds; they were making fire and dancing in Nevruz. In addition, there were specific street vendors, for instance, there was a man who has sold oil for thirty years. That's to say, they will not be able to enter this street anymore. What will be experienced in this street? French culture? There is one art gallery and thirty bars. If it is so, they should be honest; they should say that they are establishing an entertainment center. Now, many colors have disappeared, it has become two colors. Here was a lively neighborhood in which the inhabitants lived a modest life« (Postexpress 08/2004).

After this critical comment concerning the investor's one-sided cultural concept and the lack of participation by inhabitants, the »French Street« project began to be publicly discussed. The renaming of Algerian (Cezayir) Street to »French Street«, and especially the tension filled historical connections between France and Algeria were criticized by the media. Furthermore, students of several universities discussed in term or thesis papers the concept behind »French Street«. Büyükköksal/Özkan (2005) reported in their paper about »French Street«, that the reporter of the newspaper Milliyet, Ahmet Tulgar, loudly insisted on his right not to be searched by the security before entering a public street. Additionally, Büyükköksal/Özkan (2005) write about two small demonstrations against the security and the street's renaming.

Furthermore, the well known internet panel for architects »Arkitera« opened a public opinion survey about »French Street«. It was found that 53% of the respondents expressed agreement with the project, while 45% of the survey participants were more critical of the French Street project (http://forum.arkitera.com/istanbul 07/2004).[3]

Furthermore, my own interviews with representatives of Istanbul's intellectuals such as artists, journalists, and university professors, revealed their advanced criticism toward the project. An artist who, since the late 60s, lives in Istanbul and concerns herself with the city's transformation, stated: »I see it as a real estate development project with the aim of making money. I must admit that I have not walked down the street. I looked down [the street from one end] and found it uninteresting. I did not feel

3 223 people have voted in the Arkitera opinion survey. (http://forum. artikera.com/istanbul 2004)

like walking down a street that did not look interesting to me«[4]. A member of the European Capital Committee expressed his critical position concerning the implementation of the project:

»They transformed this place into a French street. And it is humorsome that the name ›French Street‹ was Cezayir Street [Algerian Street]; the local people were Romani living there and they had to go. […] So this type of transformation is no alternative. The vision of the public authority is that of the investors« (Member of cultural capital committee 08/2006).

One outcome of the ongoing public criticism was a complaint from French Street's operators union, consisting of restaurant's or shop managers, about the lack of commercial success. It was asked for a rebranding of the street, as is stated in a paper presented by the operator's alliances: »the search for alternative names for the street have resulted in associations between the street and the ›Algerian Independence War‹« (Unofficial action paper of »French Street« operators 2006).

Furthermore, the name »French Street« is no longer officially promoted. In 2007 large signs marking the areas entrances were erected, welcoming visitors to Cezayir Sokağı, not »French Street«. Even before the new signs were hung up, and soon after the opening of the street, visible security controls at street entrances were removed. Instead security employees dressed in street clothes patrol the area, but are not perceived as security. Music played in the restaurants is not just French, but international or Turkish as well. The developer adapted his concept to the special needs of its customers; their demands and lifestyles did not fit with the negative propaganda about the French-Algerian war or the rumors about the mistreatment of former inhabitants. They did not blindly accept the exclusively French concept of the street.

Conclusion

During the last century, Istanbul experienced significant political and therefore spatial and social transformations. Contemporary daily life in Istanbul has been influenced by Turkey's political and economic shift towards neoliberal policies and the liberalization of its markets in the 80s. In turn, these transitions have caused a shift with regard to the city's design objectives from local to global. Therefore the city government became market oriented and conducted its business in a less managerial

4 The artist asked me not to tell his name in publications.

oriented way. In fact, it was in the 1980s that the introduction of the metropolitan governance model enabled Istanbul's municipality to plan and implement projects by itself for the first time. Previously, urban planning in Istanbul was the task of the central government in Ankara. But Istanbul's tremendous growth made a coordinated urban development of the city impossible; rather the city's expansion was characterized by informal growth financed by private investors. Private enterprises started to influence planning processes and decision making leading to frequent private/public partnerships as they became an inherent component of urban development strategies in Istanbul.

As is comparable with cities worldwide, developments in Istanbul's center are mainly concerned with tourism, consumption and entertainment. Most of the prestigious sites are consciously designed by private enterprises for urban elites or tourists, whose lifestyles and consumption patterns are influenced by media and therefore by western values. One of these private development projects is the »French Street« in Beyoğlu whose concept follows a global trend of urban theming.

In times of ongoing competition between cities, the implementation of historically themed projects, which are specific to locality, is a commonly used urban strategy, especially in inner city districts. But how is this global trend translated to the local level in the case of »French Street«? Which powers stand behind the manifestation of »French Street«?

In my analyses the tremendous influence of the private sector on the representation of culture and on the decision on which culture is to be represented, has been underlined. The developer, Taşdiken, and his real estate group influenced the planning, implementation and the maintenance processes in Cezayir Sokağı considerably. By using their political and financial power to sell their concept, Afitaş inserted a »French theme park« into traditional residential city fabric with ease. Moreover, Afitaş was allowed to use nearly the entire project area for commercial and consumption purposes. Public authorities participated in the project's development, but primarily in a supportive role. Particularly the tremendous political power exercised by the Mayor of Greater Istanbul, Ali Müfit Gürtuna, accelerated the authorization procedure by the Beyoğlu Municipality.

In summary, the power laden network structures behind the implementation process were crucial to the project's success. The developer used his private networks to finance the project by inviting friends to invest. Of most significance, however, were Taşdiken's connections to the highest authority in the municipality, which led to an accelerated application process and ultimately to project approval.

On the other hand, public discussion initiated by magazines and newspapers who published supportive and critical statements and the internet panel, Arkitera, that opened an opinion survey, provided a counter response to the development. In the case of »French Street«, this counter flow, absent in the planning process, was undertaken by the press and the city's inhabitants. Nonetheless, these discussions about the project's concept were first discussed after the project's implementation. The debate, however, highlighted several important points. Firstly, Istanbul's inherent social conflict between low income groups and urban elites were again revealed. A lack of participation from low income groups, and the challenges generated by prestigious inner-city development, also critical issues the »French Street« project, were underlined, while the superimposition of a French identity in a street named Algeria Street exposed unsolved issues of identity in Istanbul. Finally, the project's lack of success led only to a minimal economic turnover, to the alteration of its security measures and to the reduction of the French theme.

However, the private and public stakeholders used the image of a cosmopolitan and therefore European Istanbul to promote their project. The developers tried to nostalgically link French culture to the Ottoman Beyoğlu of the late 19th and early 20th century, a period known for its multi-ethnic population. By implementing French cuisine, French lifestyle and French music, the developer connected the local specifics of place, despite its somewhat invented nature, to a pleasurable experience of consumption. The French ideal is beloved in Istanbul, as it evokes the bygone times of a multiethnic, modern, and elegant Istanbul. Hence, it may be argued that an investment, like French Street, is worthwhile in a neighborhood like Beyoğlu that is supposed to be developed according to its European roots.

From the »French Street« case study it is not possible to concede that the Europeanization tendency described here is comparable to other worldwide movements. The design motifs in »French Street« are influenced by a longing for a European identity, but cannot be automatically derived from an affection for European culture. Nevertheless, the use of these French design motifs are, on one hand a consequent link to Ottoman history, but on the other hand, a marketable image of cultural tolerance in a global scale. The French design motifs have grown from a longing for the cosmopolitan glory experienced during the Ottoman Empire. The Greek identity, also part of the native European identity in Istanbul and Beyoğlu was after the wars, pogroms and population exchanges between Greece and Turkey, not deemed marketable. In exchange the association with France has been re-territorialized in Beyoğlu

but simultaneously creolized and replaced in accordance with the needs of the customer that fits in the expectation of the profit-oriented investor.

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