

“Istanbul Modern” – Urban Images, Planning Processes and the Production of Space in Istanbul’s Port Area

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Thinking about Istanbul, one of the first images coming to mind is that of water. Istanbul is surrounded by water. Water is part of the topographic landscape; it separates the city and connects the different waterfronts. Throughout its history, water in Istanbul has meant transportation, defence and economy, and since antiquity the shores have been locations for harbour activities, trade or recreation. The silhouette of the city, with its hilly urban landscapes, bridges, mosques and minarets seen from the Bosphorus is one of the most reproduced images of the city. There are reams of poetry, songs and other narrations about the waterfront, silhouettes and vistas of Istanbul.

By the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn Istanbul is divided into three parts. At the south side of the natural harbour of the Golden Horn, there is the so-called “historic peninsula”. Beyond the historic city wall the city is expanding about 60 km to the west at the shores of the Marmara Sea, where at all times a huge number of boats is waiting for a place in the harbor areas or a passage through the Bosphorus. The northern side of the Golden Horn, previously called “Galata” or “Pera”, became known as the non-Muslim area for traders and diplomats. Today it is defined by the crowded and cosmopolitan centre around modern Taksim Square with its hotels, nightlife areas and shopping streets expanding further north to the new central business district, into canyons of poorer neighbourhoods and valleys of gated communities.

The Bosphorus, a strait of about 30 km connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, divides the European and Asian parts of the metropolis. Similar to the extensions on the western side, at the eastern side

the urban landscape is expanding along the Marmara Sea as a patchwork of old middle class and newer working class neighbourhoods, of commercial areas, shopping malls and new industrial port areas. At both shores of the Bosphorus up to the Black Sea, former fishing villages and summer residences are incorporated into the city. The shores and scenic harbour areas now function as attractive living areas and touristy destinations alike.



Fig. 1: Map of Istanbul with “Galataport Project” (graphic by Sacha Essayie)

From the beginning of the 20th century industrialisation and modernisation have influenced the development of the historic port area of Istanbul. Even though the city grew extensively in the last 50 years, one main focus is still the area where the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea come together. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were a significant number of urban development projects all over the metropolitan area as well as in the historic centre of the city. The aim of urban transformation projects in the former port areas is to revitalise the waterfront, which is characterised by dense and run-down building structures, immense traffic as well as great tourist attractiveness, which seems to be the crucial mixture for processes of gentrification and modernisation. There are increasing discussions among politicians, planners, investors, the mass media and representatives of social urban movements about the significance of the waterfronts, their possible uses and their accessibility as public spaces.

As in other port cities around the world, Istanbul's urban transformation processes have become symbols or models in relation to global economics, local power structures and the constitution of space (Schubert 2001, see in this volume). Waterfronts, with their exposed visibility, are stages for representing the city (Marshall 2001). Innovative urban planning projects and spectacular new architecture are often used as physical and metaphorical landmarks of a city's prosperity and attractiveness. Different actors and interest groups are involved in the creation of these new urban images. The transformation of waterfronts in their specific economic, social and political – local as well as global – contexts has become a “hot topic” of urban planning and the production of urban space (Bruttomesso 1993). Waterfronts are spaces in transition.

In this context, urban space is defined as a dynamic site of social and cultural constructions, which are materialised in physical places, social interactions, as well as in urban imaginaries and discursive representations (Harvey 1993; Lefèbvre 1994). Space in this sense is seen as cultural, i.e. continuously produced or constituted by structuring and space-producing activities (Löw 2001).

Processes of urban planning, social lobbying, material construction and public discussion involve various urban actors. With regard to social and cultural dynamics, these processes of urban transformation are a privileged field for an ethnographic analysis of the constitution and production of space.

To work on space with an ethnographic approach, means to recognise at least two distinct levels of investigation. On the one hand, space is a concrete or material site. Built space provides symbolic meanings as well as physical boundaries (Atkinson 2005). The investigation of these physical places, the ways of experiencing, perceiving and appropriating by different actors in everyday life, is one part of the fieldwork. On the other hand, conceptions of space, manifesting itself in the ideas of a city, in urban planning projects and urban representations need to be investigated in their respective discursive contexts. An ethnographic approach involves the historic development of the sites, descriptions of the physical spaces, the actors and interest groups involved in the process of transformation, as well as the meanings and sometimes contradictory significances of these spaces for everyday life and urban representation.

A possible starting point for ethnographic research on planning processes is the analysis and interpretation of the development of urban master plans. They are results of intensive research of the urban condition; they are manifestations of urban concepts and the basis of urban imaginaries. Developers, politicians, architects, the media and the local community are among the actors involved in the process of development

and presentation (see Hall 1993: 16). Conflicts and processes of negotiations between these interest groups with their perspectives, imaginaries and practices (of almost inevitable opposite interests) are another possible focus of ethnographic research.

In this article I shall look at the historic development of the waterfront and urban transformation projects in former port areas of Istanbul, “following a discourse” (Marcus 1993) by analysing urban images as well as the processes of planning and negotiation about the waterfront areas of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, in order to understand the constitution of spaces and public spheres in contemporary Istanbul. As an exemplary case, I shall focus on one urban transformation project which has caused a public debate: The *Galataport Project*, a conglomeration of warehouses between a main traffic axis and the waterfront, is situated at the European side of the Bosphorus shores. It is located close to the tourist attractions of the historic peninsula, as well as to the modern central area of Taksim Square. As a first reference to up-coming transformations of the area, 2005 a private museum for modern art, *Istanbul Modern*, opened in one of the warehouses. *Galataport Project* shows some analogies with other port cities, concerning phases of industrial and economic change, specific strategies of urban planning and the role of cultural industries in processes of globalisation and urban transformation. At the same time there are local perspectives and dynamics, concerning the specific history of the metropolis as well as the contemporary cultural and political situation impacting the process.

In order to contextualise different phases with processes of modernisation and globalisation, I shall briefly describe the history of the development of port activities in Istanbul. In the next section, I shall concentrate on projects and plans of waterfront renewal since the 1980s. In my description of the new master plan, I shall focus on the role of cultural industries in contemporary processes of urban transformation. Detailed descriptions of the site of the *Galataport Project* and of different actors involved in the planning process, will serve as a basis for an ethnographic perspective on urban images. The article closes with a summary of preliminary findings and hypotheses about the processes of planning and the production of space in former port areas of Istanbul.

History: Istanbul as a port city

The earliest Byzantine settlements were founded around the Golden Horn about 700, which was used as a natural harbour (Kilic et al. 2005; Müller-Wiener 1994). In the Byzantine era (4th-7th century) the city be-

came a centre for political, economic, cultural activities on the transit route of European, Black Sea, Middle East and Far East trade. The harbour was the focal point, where different ethnic groups met and worked. The main axis of the settlement was along the shores of the Marmara Sea (Kiliç et al. 2005). In the late Byzantine era (7th-15th century), Constantinople was physically transformed into an inward looking city, concentrated around the churches and market places. At this time, the district “Galata” on the northern shores of the Golden Horn became a centre for Genoese traders, hence the city assumed a more cosmopolitan culture with different religions and languages (Kiliç et al. 2005). In the Ottoman period (15th-19th century) Istanbul symbolised the power of the state. With the change of the dominant religion, buildings of religious worship, constructed on the top of the hills, became representative and defining elements of the city’s identity, visible especially from the sea. The main axis of the city and its social dynamics were located towards the Golden Horn, with its specialised trade-harbours. In Ottoman times the waterfront was regarded as a market place, the water itself was the most important medium for transportation. Apart from the private piers of the wealthy classes, there were specific public piers for ferry boats. Mosques, fountains and cafés next to the piers made these sites at the waterfront significant places of social interaction and everyday practice (Bas Butuner 2006: 2).



Fig. 2: Postcard, lithograph of the silhouette of the historic peninsular, southern shores of the Golden Horn, 18th century

At the beginning of the 19th century, an area of orientation towards western culture and modernity began, which signified not only transfor-

mations on political and administrative levels, but also new influences in architecture, urban development and life style. As a symbol of modernity, democratic and secular public squares – some of them close to the waterfront – were created and designed with fountains and clock towers. These objects at striking urban vistas became public monuments of early modern Ottoman society and power (Gönenç 2006: 28f). In the second half of the 19th century, the Ottoman state invested in new harbour facilities in the centre of the city, at the shores of the Golden Horn and the western side of the Bosphorus. As an effect of early industrialisation and developing technology, huge warehouses and docks were constructed. The intense production activities and the new structures characterising the connections between production sites and transportation, dominated most zones on the waterfronts, but made the waterfront inaccessible for the citizens at these sites (Bas Butuner 2006: 2).

At the same time, the state began to represent itself with impressive palaces at the waterfront (Interview Esen 03/2007).¹ The waterfronts of Istanbul became a fragmented mixture of warehouses, docks and port-related industries, mainly in the part closest to the historic city centre at the Golden Horn and the lower parts of the Bosphorus. The aristocratic and wealthy chose areas further up north the Bosphorus. At this time, yet another aspect of the use of waterfronts came up: citizens and members of the palace began to use the water for recreation and entertainment, and the first sea baths emerged on fancy sites at the Marmara Sea. With the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923), new concepts and attitudes towards the use of the waterfront were introduced. The formerly exclusive parts for the wealthy were opened for the general public; beaches and the sea became a site for festivities. Most of the now state-owned former Ottoman palaces at the waterfront were reopened as schools and other public institutions.

Modernisation in the 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century Istanbul was characterised by rapid industrialisation and an extensive demographic growth, as effects of rural-urban migration. Between the 1950s and 1980s government policies did not address the issue of public housing, but gave priority to urban in-

1 Part of my first explorative fieldwork on urban transformation processes in Istanbul in March 2007 I conducted seven interviews with urban experts as architects, urban activists and writers. Orhan Esen is urbanist, writer and city guide. He published several articles in Turkish and German about urban development processes in Istanbul, see for example Esen 2005.

frastructure in the form of water pipes, electricity and roads. One aspect of the intensive development of urban infrastructure was the construction of seaside roads along the shores of the Bosphorus, the Marmara Sea and the Golden Horn. Following a decree of the constitution of 1983, the waterfront was declared a “public good”. The effect of this law was even more construction of highways along the shores, facilitating access to the waterfront by car, but at the same time changing the shore landscape and disrupting the former relation of city and water. Public space became a space for automobilists; the view of the water was a view from the car. Today nearly 80% of the shores of Istanbul are dominated by highways (Interview Esen 03/2007).

Although in the 1950s there were still busy shipyards and industry along the banks of the Golden Horn as well as warehouses in Karaköy on the Bosphorus, a decline of inner city harbour activities was noticeable. Similar to the development of other port cities, Istanbul experienced different phases of industrialisation and de-industrialisation during the 20th century (Hoyle 1988; Schubert 2001 and in this volume). With new technologies and the containerisation of harbour activities, inner city port areas did not meet the needs for space any more, and port functions and port-based industries were relocated. New industrialised and modern harbours on the shores of the Marmara Sea led to the deindustrialisation of inner city port areas and left derelict former industrial sites.

Waterfront renewal after the 1980s

The shores of the Golden Horn are a characteristic example of the influences of global changes on urban transformation processes in Istanbul (Çelik 2004). Already from the early 1980s debates increased among politicians and planners about the revitalisation of run-down shipyards and factories, similar to North American and European harbour renewal projects (Bas Butuner 2006; Bezmez 2006). The mayor Bedrettin Dalan initiated the restructuring of large inner city areas, with the aim of transforming “Istanbul from a tired city whose glory resided in past history, into a metropolis full of promise for the twenty-first century” (Keyder/Öncü 1995: 225).

Besides large projects such as the second Bosphorus bridge, international luxury hotels and office buildings, there were ambitious plans for the area of the Golden Horn. Before 1984 undesirable industries on the shores were removed in order to create a new downtown business district and to open the waterfront to recreational and cultural activities. In

spite of intense protests from urban social movements, factories, warehouses and even old neighbourhood structures were torn down (Bas Butuner 2006: 5). Political changes in the late 1980s stopped the finalisation of these ideas. Some of the old industrial structures were saved: a former tobacco factory became a private university, a fez factory was turned into a cultural centre, while the slaughter-house planned to be a convention centre is still an unfinished construction site. Now the waterfront is a fragmented area of unfinished building projects, highways, and isolated cultural centres surrounded by empty green spaces with no direct access to the water.

Because of these major transformations, the relationship between water and land changed drastically. Not only was access to the waterfronts reduced by the highway system, but the settlement patterns following the new infrastructure changed the inhabitants' relation to the water (Yenem et al. 1993: 121). New housing projects at the periphery were developed for residents of former inner city neighbourhoods. People did not find work in the port-related factories anymore, but had to look for other jobs, for example in the textile industry. After the constructions of the highway system at the shores and bridges over the Golden Horn, the former ferry-dominated connection between the many piers on both sides lost much of its attractiveness.

In the context of global economics, de-industrialisation and the changing functions of cities in 1990s, new concepts and imaginaries of urbanism were developed.

“As cities shift from industrial to service economies, a major aspect of their success will be in the quality of their urban environments. It is here that the waterfront plays a critical role. Waterfronts are often the most degraded places in the city, being the sites of former industries. Waterfronts are also highly visible locations in most cities. The image of the city can be remade here.” (Marshall 2001: 9)

Many concepts of urban prosperity are nowadays directly connected to the transformation of former port areas. Water (including living on the waterfront) has become one of the most important “soft” location factors to measure urban quality of life. Waterfront projects seem to be a panacea for the success of cities in global competition. In the view of many politicians, urban planners and investors, waterfront development projects promise the “relaunch of the city” (Bruttomesso 2001: 47). From the 1980s urban planners, architects and theorists have been debating the possibilities and concepts for former port areas. According to Ömer Karnipak, one of the directors of the Istanbul based internet-platform

and network of architects *Arkitera*, Istanbul's waterfronts are the spaces where transformation is debated in public (Interview with Karnipak 01/2007).² Although there are conflicting interests involved, the "re-generation", "re-creation" and "re-composition" of these areas and their conversion into attractive urban spaces is nowadays a main focus of city planning (Bruttomesso 2001: 40f; Schubert 2001). The new urban silhouette, as well as the accessibility to the upgraded waterfronts are seen as a resource for urban development (see Marshall 2001: 8). Talking about a multi-functional urban space planners mainly refer to tourism, commerce, leisure and exclusive living spaces. In this neoliberal definition of cities waterfronts are a promising challenge for the future of prospering cities.

Master plan for the 21st century: The role of cultural industries

In 2004 the Mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbas, initiated the *Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Center* (IMP). At the IMP roughly 500 urban planners, architects, engineers, demographers and social scientists have been working on a new master plan for Istanbul (Staud 2006). The major goals are to control urban growth and prevent a collapse of natural resources (IMP 2006). The intention of the IMP is to keep the city manageable and attractive, referring to concerns of ecology and quality of living. One of the tasks is to decentralise the present mono-centric spatial organisation of central service functions, which means the invention of new business districts and industrial areas on the peripheries of the Asian and the European side. In the planning centre fourteen different teams are working on recommendations for regional planning, earthquake protected housing, public transportation, metropolitan planning, urban design and other issues. Beside a working group "Museum-City", concerned with revitalisation of historic buildings in favour of tourism, one group is working on urban renewal projects in so called "problem areas with substandard infrastructure instalments", including some former port areas (see IMP 2006).

In October 2006 the Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Center presented a first version of the new master plan. Murat Diren, one of the main urban planners at the IMP, emphasises the positive effects of the master plan, although the IMP has only an advisory func-

2 Ömer Karnipak is architect and founding member of the architectural network ARKITERA, see <http://www.arkitera.net/>.

tion, since local and national politicians will finally decide about urban projects to be realised (lecture on the Conference “Public Istanbul”, January 2006). Diren stresses the significance of the “cultural triangle” formed by historic and cosmopolitan neighbourhoods around the Golden Horn and the southern shores of the Bosphorus for the new transformation processes. Planners’ and investors’ strategies include promoting Istanbul as a destination for global tourism, through cultural heritage, international art festivals and congress tourism, “creating a happening city” (IMP 2006) To emphasise the uniqueness of cities, politicians, urban planners and urban managers (re)invent traditions and (re)construct spectacular architecture to promote cosmopolitan living conditions or commercialised event-culture. As a central element in contemporary urban transformation processes planners and politicians have identified cultural industries as opportunities for urban development (Florida 2002).

“[Cultural industries] provide the means for the revitalisation of run-down, deteriorated neighbourhoods and re-use of historic building stock, including industrial heritage. They also play a crucial role in branding cities and thus contribute to the capacity of cities to become major destinations for cultural tourism. They help to create an urban environment in which the tourists wish to stay longer and visit the city once again.” (IMP 2006).

The development and promotion of cultural industries in the film-, festival-, fashion design- and software-sectors, is one of the main targets of urban planning and management in contemporary Istanbul (Keyder 1999: 22). In this context, Culture and the Arts are especially seen as commodities in the global competition of cities.

The inner city waterfronts of Istanbul are attractive sites for new spectacular architecture in combination with cultural industries, tourism and recreation. Therefore, the triangle from the Golden Horn to the southern shores of the Bosphorus is dominated by waterfront projects. As in Istanbul cultural interests are largely concerning historical sites, the monuments of Byzantine and Ottoman empires serve as places of identification, as well as magnets for tourism (Çelik 1994: 93). Until now Istanbul was not known as a place of modern art, but with the transformation of the metropolis under parameters of globalisation and cultural industries, interest in modern art has been increasing. Apart from a growing number of art galleries and institutions, since 1987, like in other metropolis (e.g. Rio de Janeiro, La Habana, Seoul) the Istanbul Biennial has transformed the self-conception of the city and its perception from

outside. Istanbul today presents the image of a vivid active metropolis with growing cultural industries (Kaiç 2005).

In December 2004, Istanbul got its first museum of contemporary art. The museum is promoted by the *Istanbul Foundation for Arts and Culture*, which is financed by private enterprises. The museum is located in a former warehouse at the banks of the Bosphorus. It is part of the *Galataport Project*, where a cruise terminal and hotels are planned for on the urban waterfront. The inauguration of the museum *Istanbul Modern* was internationally acknowledged. It was interpreted as an important place of common European cultural heritage and as a further step to “cultural modernisation of the city”.³



Fig. 3: Museum “Istanbul Modern” (photo: Kathrin Wildner)

Karaköy harbour area

The significance of the museum “Istanbul Modern” at this specific location can be analysed in the context of the contemporary waterfront development project *Galataport*. As part of the former Karaköy port area at the western shores of the Bosphorus it is one of the main zones of tran-

3 See article about the inauguration of the museum Istanbul Modern on the website of the Turkish enterprise and founder of the museum Eczacıbaşı, <http://www.eczacibasi.com/articles/detail/detail1.asp?id=434&archive=1>, dated 01/07/2005 [26/02/2008].

sition in Istanbul. Before the mid-19th century, this part of the harbour had an important role in trading activities. After the decline of the Ottoman Empire and a big fire in 1863 most of the area was covered by newly constructed port facilities and warehouses. (Erbil/Erbil 2001: 186). When in the 1970s Haydarpaşa on the Anatolian side became the new container terminal, Karaköy harbour lost more functions and in 1988 was finally closed as a cargo port due to heavy traffic problems caused by the loading and unloading of trucks. At the same time, it still served as a passenger port and became even more important for cruise ships bound for the Black Sea States after the opening of the Russian borders in the early 1990s. Finally there was a new port site opened only for trade with Black Sea states at the Marmara Sea shores (see Erbil/Erbil 2001: 187).



Fig. 4: Waterfront views of Karaköy area (photo: Kathrin Wildner)

Obviously, Karaköy harbour area is a highly attractive zone at the waterfront of the historic city centre of Istanbul. As a consequence, the *Galataport Project*, a strip of more than one kilometre along the waterfront covering about 8.5 ha of terrain, is one of the currently most valuable urban transformation projects of Istanbul port areas. After closing down the Karaköy harbour area in 1988, the *Turkish Maritime Organization* (TDI), a state owned enterprise and owner of the terrain, decided to develop the *Galataport Project*, where – similar to other regeneration projects around the world – the former port area is to be equipped with a cruise terminal, hotels, a shopping centre, cultural and leisure facilities to create a new tourist attraction for millions of visitors to Istanbul (see

Bas Buntuner 2006: 8). In 2002 the Turkish architecture office Tabanlıoğlu & Co. presented their first proposal for the regeneration of this area as a tourist-orientated commercial zone (Gönenç 2006: 51).



Fig. 5: Area of the Galataport Project (Sacha Essayie)

Today most of the territory at Karaköy harbour including the *Galataport Project* is still a space in transition. Both banks of the Galata Bridge – the ferry boat terminal Eminönü on the Historic peninsula and Karaköy on the Galata side – are busy traffic junctions composed of streets, tram stops and ferry boat terminals. On the Karaköy side next to the bridge, there is a fish market and a vivid public space used by tourists and Istanbul citizens alike viewing the Historic Peninsula opposite. A promenade along the waterfront leads to the Karaköy ferry terminal for commuters to Üsküdar and Kadıköy on the Asian side of the city. A mixture of architecture characterises this part of the waterfront. One six story art-nouveau style building hosts the Turkish Marina Organisation *Türk Denizcilik İşletmeleri*, next to it a three-storey building in a modernist international style serves as a warehouse and a terminal for national and international ferry boats. On the ground floors of these office buildings are fish-restaurants and cafe terraces. After about 500 m, the promenade at the waterfront is closed for public access. The buildings seen from the waterside are a composition of older warehouses and office buildings, which are not extensively used anymore. The architecture is a mixture of two-storey buildings from the first half of the 20th century, and some functional modernist structures of the 1950s. Most of the buildings are still in use and seem in bad shape, some are abandoned.

The heart of the *Galataport Project* is characterised by four huge warehouses. Now located between parking lots and office buildings, in the 19th century this area was designed as a public space. Between the historic Kiliç Ali Pasa and the Nusretiye Mosques with their surrounding spaces and parks, there is a beautifully decorated 18th century public fountain and one of Istanbul's first clock towers from the early 19th century. The public fountain and the clock tower are reminders of the westernised concepts for places of gathering and political representation (Gönenç 2006: 46).

As there is no access from the waterfront, the Museum can only be entered from the main road, which connects the Karaköy area with the ferry terminal of Kabataş. Nearly hidden behind the Mosque is an entrance to a parking lot surrounded by four huge warehouses. Next to a security booth controlling the access to the parking lot, a red sign indicates that this is also the entrance to *Istanbul Modern*, the first modern art museum of Istanbul opened in 2004.

After one of the warehouses was used for an art exhibition at the UN Habitat II Istanbul Summit in 1996, the former storage place was used as a venue at the Istanbul Biennial. These activities and appropriation made public access to this area temporarily possible and indicated potential uses of the industrial buildings after years of closure because of harbour activities. Inhabitants of Istanbul became more and more interested in the site and the possibilities to use it as public space. For example from the café terrace of the art museum, which is increasingly visited by (art interested and young) Istanbul citizens, there is a great view of the Bosphorus and the Asian side. As the pier along the seaside is still a custom zone, the area is closed off by fences. Huge letters on the facade *Istanbul Modern* facing the Bosphorus seem like a visual manifestation of an urban imaginary, which extends from the building itself to the silhouette of the waterfront including the urban environment. Right next to the entrance of the museum, between the warehouses, there is a little square with workshops and restaurants. Some of the shops, now used temporarily as workshops, still have English names referring to its former use as the souvenir and shopping area for visitors arriving on the international cruise ships. The incompleteness and run down state of this attractive site at the shores of the Bosphorus next to the representative *Istanbul Modern* mark this place in an obvious way as an area in transition. And actually this zone, composed of warehouses around a parking lot, is the heart of the urban transformation project *Galataport Project*. Following the main road, outside the complex of the warehouse buildings, there are more buildings from the 1950s and 1960s hosting banks,

insurances and local or national administrative institutions, leading to the impressive 19th century building of Mimar Sinan University. This Istanbul Art Academy occupies a space directly at the waterfront, but since the territory is the property of the University public access to the waterfront is not allowed. Past this building the road opens again into a small park, used by citizens for fishing and recreation at the shores. Some informal vendors sell tea. The park leads to the ferry terminal of Kabataş, enlarged in 2006. A new public transportation system connects the ferry terminal with the public transportation system at Taksim Square, so commuters from Kadıköy and Üsküdar from the Asian side are well connected with the modern city centre at Taksim and the new business district of Levent and Maslak. The surrounding neighbourhoods of the Karaköy harbor area and the upcoming *Galataport Project* are blocked off from the waterfront by a busy road with heavy traffic. On the other side of the road steep streets and stairs lead to the residential neighbourhoods of Tophane and Cihangir. Tophane, part of the former Genoese trader quarter Galata, is today a more or less run down residential area. Most of the old buildings are deteriorated. Close to the former Karaköy harbour there are leftovers of an unofficial red-light district. The population is mainly poor first generation migrants from the eastern provinces of Turkey (Erbil/Erbil 2001: 186). In some parts of Tophane a new kind of small-scale gentrification process pioneered by young artists has been taking place since the late 1990s (Uzun/Yücesöy 2006: 10).

Cihangir, an old residential neighbourhood located on the slope of the hill towards the Taskim place, has one of the city's most beautiful panoramic views on the Bosphorus and the Historic Peninsula. From the 16th century onwards a non-Muslim cosmopolitan and elite population has lived here. After the expulsion of the Jewish, Armenian and Greek communities in the 1950s and 1960s the neighbourhood was marked by decline until in the 1990s a gentrification process pioneered by intellectuals and artists took place. The architectural structure of old apartment houses built in the early 20th century and its location close to the central Taksim area nowadays make it an attractive residential area for a wealthy middle class. Cihangir still has an active community structure taking part in the discussions on urban transformation processes (Uzun/Yücesöy 2006: 9f).

The *Galataport Project* is part of these discussions and ongoing public debates between politicians, investors, architects, community leaders and media about urban planning and the future of this area. With the public presentation of the architectural proposal for the *Galataport Project*, published in daily newspapers and architectural magazines in

2005, the processes of planning as well as a functional regeneration of the waterfront itself became a highly discussed topic.

A closer look at the different actors and their arguments provides a framework for analysing dialectical processes of the production of urban space (Harvey 1993) as well as heterogeneous concepts of public space and urban images in the local context of Istanbul.

Actors of the planning process

The publication of the architectural plans for restructuring the *Galata-port Project* created an intensive debate about public spaces and their privatisation. Different actors, such as politicians, urban planners, investors and representatives of social movements take part in these debates, in which conceptual backgrounds and imaginaries about urban space are negotiated.

Because of the inefficiency of the Karaköy harbour and its closing, *Turkish Maritime Organization* (TDI), a state-owned company and present owner of the space, attempted from the late 1980s to privatise the area. In 1990, TDI invited international firms to design a portside facilities concept, a hotel complex and business offices. For the state, economy and the profitable transformation of the former harbour site are the main motives of urban planning. With an international cruise terminal and recreational areas more tourists would be attracted (Erbil/Erbil 2001: 187). As tourism is one of the main branches of the economy of Istanbul the dominant Ministry of Tourism is interested in including this area into the development of the historic city centre and to recreate the waterfront as a tourism and business complex similar to successful models of European and North American cities.

Private investors were invited to compete about the area. The highest bid for port facilities, hotel and recreation came from a consortium of Royal Caribbean Cruises, owned by the Israel Ofer family and Turkish Global Holding. For 3,5 billion US Dollars TDI would lease the *Galata-port* area for 49 years and give the right to build and operate this zone to the investors. But before the investors started the transformation, the project was postponed due to some legal discordance between the national and the local administration (Interview Karnipak 01/2007).

Although the municipality of Istanbul is not completely against this project, their main opposition is based on the fact, that the local administration is not at all involved in the processes of planning for this area. In fact, the central government has been disregarding the actual master plan of the *Istanbul Metropolitan Planning Center* (IMP) (Erbil/Erbil 2001:

188). Only recently the IMP, as a municipality based institution, gained influence in decision making by demanding and intensifying public discussions. With their proposal focusing on an urban balance of ecological, functional and cultural aspects (see IMP 2006) the IMP is working as a mediator between economic orientated national ministries and local politicians concerned about a functional urban structure. On the other hand for some urban planners working for the IMP a new urban vision of the historic part of Istanbul is related to the focus on cultural industries. Karaköy harbour is seen as a central part of a “cultural triangle” around the Golden Horn and the western Bosphorus shores up to Kadıköy on the Asian side (IMP 2006). Historical heritage, tourism and contemporary cultural activities (e.g. film and software sector, cultural festivals and fairs as well as art exhibitions) are in this context not only profitable parameters of a location factor, but are seen as promising elements of urban space and the cultural identity of a city. Knowing about the importance of cultural identity for the urban image of the city, architects try to give meaning to spaces by “keeping alive memory of the places in form of marinas”, thinking about a mixture of private and public spaces in the form of hotels as well as “traditional public spaces”, such as plazas, streets, parks and museums (Bruttomesso 2001: 45f).

Another important actor in the process of urban planning in Istanbul is the Chamber of Architects. Traditionally, the Chamber is the institutional board for all topics concerning architecture. The members are proud of their cosmopolitan Istanbul lifestyle, seeing architecture as an art. They do not always agree with the plans of urban transformation developed by politicians and urban planners. In fact, the Chamber is a strong opposing institution in the specific arrangement of actors in the field of urban transformation. In the case of the *Galataport Project*, members of the Chamber tried to stop the restructuring plans. The project was criticised for destroying the historical characteristics and the silhouette of the site. They argued that by building high-rise buildings the historic city-scape of Istanbul would be destroyed and the views would be blocked (Bas Butuner 2006: 8). This argument refers to the significance of the waterfront for the urban image of Istanbul. The specific geographic situation of Istanbul as formed by the three pieces of land divided by large expanses of water, the hilly topographic situation and the steep slopes of the shores mark the identity of the city. The water separates the three parts of the city and at the same time joins them together as a unit. The view over the water to the respective other side of the city is one of the important identifying urban elements. “These expanses (of water) transform themselves into ritualized spectacles, have long since been the principal reason for Istanbul to be known as a legen-

dary home to vistas” (Bilgin 2006: 3). Since the city planning of the late Ottoman times, silhouettes and panoramic views are continuously praised and represented in literature, postcards, official advertisements and in everyday life (Bilgin 1998: 2041).

The silhouette and vista is one of the most important elements of identification with the city for settled Istanbul citizens. The professor for regional and urban planning at the Mimar Sinan Architectur faculty, Aykut Karaman, claims the water parts of Istanbul as an open public space in the sense of an urban image, a common experience and a parameter of urban identity (Interview Karaman 02/2007). In this context arguments against the *Galataport Project* refer to the dangers of privatisation, which would diminish the possibility for citizens to use this area as a recreational space (Erbil/Erbil 2001:188). Accessibility is also a major argument of non-government organisations and organisations in the nearby neighbourhoods of Cihangir and Galata are against the urban transformation project. They are demanding the public space for the inhabitants of the very densely populated structures of their neighbourhoods. The Cihangir neighbourhood association has mainly been active in formulating their interests in opposition, reclaiming the harbour area as the only possible opening to the sea and proposing a more open use of the waterfront with public walkways, cafes, restaurants and other recreational facilities instead of shopping malls for tourists (Erbil/Erbil 2001:188). The editors of the quarterly magazine *Istanbul* focusing on urban discussions, claim that shopping malls and cafes are not public meeting places for the people living in the neighbourhood, but that they have only commercial use (Interview Morgul/Atayurt 04/2007). In this sense, more radical artist groups of the Galata neighbourhood criticise, that shopping malls which are supposed to be free for public access, would be restricted by pricing policy, which will keep a vast majority of city dwellers outside (x-urban 2006). These critical groups interpret the opening of the *Istanbul Modern* art museum and the spectacular events for special invitees as a first step towards establishing an exclusive production of culture, which is to be expected at the *Galataport Project* (x-urban 2006). In their perspective the museum serves as an attractive stimulation for investors to present possibilities of cultural industries in recreating the abandoned waterfront.

These few examples of actors involved in the planning process, and of discussion about the transformation of the former Karaköy port area into the *Galataport Project*, demonstrate different interests and definitions of urban public space. The arguments and statements show divergent ideas concerning economic, functional or social attributions to urban space and possibilities of every day appropriation.



Fig. 6: Waterfront as public space, a temporary tea garden. (photo: Kathrin Wildner)

Conclusion

Waterfront areas in Istanbul are undergoing a significant transformation, which can be contextualised in the processes of de-industrialisation and global competitions of cities. The revitalisation of former port areas, as the example of *Galataport Project* has shown, is an important element of contemporary urban planning in Istanbul. In comparison to other port cities there are similar structures and concepts for the transformation of former port areas into tourist attractions by implementing cruise terminals, hotels and office buildings.

But at the same time there are specific local aspects of the planning process, concerning arguments and actors involved in the discussions. In the case of Istanbul water and waterfront as a central urban image have a significant (and historic) meaning for identification with the urban space. Analysing these arguments in more detail will be the object of further research and fieldwork, with the aim of understanding the complexity of urban planning processes and the constitution of space.

The preliminary results described in this article show that the process of transformation of the waterfront in Istanbul is not simply a question of architecture or urban design, nor is it just to be interpreted in the global context of economy and global competitions of cities. Plan-

ning processes provoke oppositions and create spaces for discussions about the future of urban space. The discussions about the meaning and form of urban spaces can be analysed as “space-producing activities”, and they are related to the main political topics in contemporary Turkey. Ethnographic research of local urban planning processes, by means of analysing the physical space, social interactions and the urban images produced in public debates, can provide in-depth information about contemporary discourses and the imaginary of urban space.

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