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İSTANBUL AND THE BOSPHORUS

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The Bosphorus is a unique spot of natural beauty in that it both separates and unites the two Continents. Starting from the ancient times, it has acted as a bridge between the East and the West serving an important waterway connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

The Bosphorus stretches as a canal changing its direction at five points. The two banks are almost parallel to each other and the bays on one bank mostly have a promontory corresponding to them on the other bank. On both sides there are parallel valleys separated from one another by hills of 100 to 200 meters high.

The first settlements on the Bosphorus were located on the small flat pieces of land where the detached valley opening up to the waterway in harmony with nature. These villages later on gradually climbed up to hillsides. Unfortunately, today, the settlements on the Bosphorus are rapidly escalating from the hillsides towards the hilltops and destroying the historic and natural environment.

For İstanbul, the Bosphorus has the significance of being a symbol above and beyond the symbol of any other city in the world. In addition to its unique natural beauty, the Bosphorus enjoys the rich accumulation of the historic and cultural values inherited from the Byzantine and the Ottoman times together with the contribution of the people presently living there.

Today, the Bosphorus is under the pressure created by the Metropolitan İstanbul, which is going through a phase of rapid transformation in terms of urban intensity and expansion. The rapid increase in the population of İstanbul, which is approximately 4.81% per year



(1985-1990), forces the rural and natural make up and history of the Bosphorus to turn into urbanized areas. In this process of unexpected urbanization, historic settlements and natural spots are being replaced by luxury dwellings and concrete apartment blocks as demanded by high and middle-income groups; and some other parts of the Bosphorus are being covered by squatter areas built by low-income groups.

On the other hand, after the construction of the two suspension bridges over the Bosphorus in 1973 and 1988 the use of land on both sides have been strongly affected. The bridges and related highways have destroyed green areas on the hillsides and brought a rapid development of Co-operative housing and squatter settlements in the Back scene and the Buffer Zones. The First Bridge led to the development of various central functions at and around the connection points on both sides, which resulted in the construction of quite high office buildings affecting the skyline especially on the European Side.

Under these circumstances, the Bosphorus is in danger of losing all its natural and historic values under the pressure caused by the planned and/or unplanned rapid urbanization and the unhealthy artificial environment caused by hectic industrialization.

At present, cities find themselves going through tremendously complex technological, economic, social and cultural transformations. Unfortunately, Istanbul has been caught in this inevitable transformation quite unprepared, and in the last forty years it has experienced rather dramatically the "growing pains" which the other similar metropolitan cities of the world have gradually undergone in a much longer period.

Planning authorities and related institutions have emphasized, time and again, the importance and necessity of protecting the unique beauty and peculiar characteristics of the Bosphorus, and tried to take conservation decisions and measures in order to guarantee its planned development.

Conservation and planning activities carried out in the Bosphorus area as a whole, has been quite recent. Up to 1970s, building activities in the villages on the two banks of the Bosphorus had been carried out according to the village development plans of dated 1941, 1950 and 1954 with the scale of 1/2000 and according to the limited local development plans of various dates and scales .

The first attempt to protect the Bosphorus Area was a decision dated, October 10, 1970, for the listing and designating the historic yalı's of the Coastal Zone. With the revision of this decision dated, May 13, 1972, 89 First Group, 209 Second Group, 67 Third Group, total 365 examples of civil architecture were listed and designated.

The Bosphorus area was first taken up as a planned conservation site with the Coastal Zone Conservation Plan in 1971 the scale of 1/5000. This plan, however, comprised only the coastal strips on the Bosphorus and stipulated that the existing designated historic yalı's and other historic buildings should be taken under conservation, and that in the empty lots, only those buildings, in harmony with the historic buildings of a maximum height of 9.50 meters, should be allowed .

In 1973, with Act No 1710 of Antiquities coming into force, development activities in the Bosphorus area were directed according to the conservation decisions of the Supreme Council of Immovable Antiquities and Monuments (SCIAM). Another important step taken in 1973 with the aim of taking under conservation the natural as well as the historical values in the Bosphorus Area stipulated that the woods and the greens would be listed and designated, that construction in the public woods would be prohibited and the manner of using private parks would be decided according to the decision of SCIAM .

The first master plan with the scale of 1/5000 comprising the whole of the Bosphorus area came into force on June 3rd, 1977, and was later revised in 1978 and in 1979. The activities being carried out according to the plan of 1979 were stopped in 1980 by SCIAM on the claim that it contained clauses adverse to conservation rules .

A new plan, prepared according to some new principles, was approved and brought into implementation in 1982 . In this new plan, the Bosphorus Area had been divided into four sections as the Coastal Zone, the Forescene Zone (total 4300 hectares), the Backscene Zone (1000 hectares) and the Buffer Zone (5300 hectares). The plan had stipulated the conservation of woods and greens, had set the terms for building development in private parks, and had created space for new housing areas. This practice also suffered from some limitations brought on by the decree of the Cabinet dated in January 1983.

The Cabinet Decree also predicted that the new Master Plan and the development plan for the Forescene Zone Would be completed within a period of three months. In the new Master Plan, the following decisions were adopted as the main principles: No new construction would be allowed in woods and/or in the vicinity of woods; the Coastal Zone would be rearranged as promenades; green areas would be opened to the use of the public with restaurants, cafes etc., the plots belonging to the Treasury and to the local authority would be offered to the use of the public specifically; the Bosphorus Area would not be open to urbanized functions; no buildings of health facilities, universities, collages or main offices for the private and the public sectors could be built; no new industrial areas could be created, and existing ones would be removed.

The practices that have been continuing since the 1970s had shown clearly that, the conservation and planned development of an area as unique as the Bosphorus, the regulations and the plans were far from being satisfactory and that a special act only for the conservation of the Bosphorus area was needed.

In fact, in November 1983, four months after the plan of July 22nd, 1983, had been implemented, the first Conservation Act concerning a special area was issued, which came into force as the Bosphorus Act No 2960 . The aim of this special new act was to protect and develop the historic and natural values of the public and to limit the number of those types of buildings which would encourage population intensity. A new organizational scheme was established for the conservation, planning and implementation of the Bosphorus with this specific act. The aim of this scheme was to define and arrange the conservation and building regulations to be applied specifically to the Bosphorus Area. The

organizational scheme set up by the Bosphorus Act consisted of three offices: 1. The Bosphorus Development Office (planning body); 2. The Bosphorus Building and Administrative Board (a planning body); 3. The Bosphorus Supreme Coordination of Building Construction (a coordinating body).

The Bosphorus Act No 2960, stipulated that the construction of new houses would be completely banned on the Coastal and the Forescene Zones, that only the historic listed buildings would be restored and that touristic and recreational facilities could be built; thus the 1983 plan completely lost its effectiveness especially in regard to creating new space for housing.

While conservation practices and new developments were being carried out as stipulated by the Bosphorus Act No 2960, a new act, the Construction Act No 3194 was brought into force, which led to some changes in the Bosphorus Act No 2960. With Clause No 46, Act No 3194 abolished the Bosphorus Organizational Scheme, which had been set up according to the Bosphorus Act. Act No 3194, Clause No changed the principle "No planning alterations can be made in the present plan to increase population and/or building density" as "some planning alterations can be made in the present plan taking into consideration the population and the building density". This clause of the said act also stipulated that construction can be allowed i.e. the Forescene Zone with a minimum plot size of 5 000 sq. meter, with no secretion, and the building ratio not exceeding a maximum of 6% and a building height of two storeys; the number of blocks would be free to choose. It was also accepted that the same principles would apply to forests, woods, to afforestation and green areas.

The Clause No 48 of Act No 3194 disregarding the minimum plot size in the Backscene and Buffer Zones, it was allowed to build four-storey buildings on 15% of the plots in the Backscene Zone and five storey buildings on 15% of the plots in the Buffer Zone .

With Provisional Clause No 7 of Act No 3194 it was stipulated that illegally constructed buildings and squatter settlements would be amnestied and accepted as legal and existing garret attics would be converted into full flats within the same height. However, with the decision of the Constitutional Court dated December 12, 1986, the Amnesty Act stipulated by Clause No 47 and Provisional Clause No 7, which had formerly comprised the Bosphorus, was canceled and the cancellation decision was published in the Official Gazette of April 18, 1987.

The new Backscene and the Buffer Zone Master and Development Plan was approved in 1988. The plan comprising a section of the Backscene Zone of Approximately 1000 hectares and a Rural and an Urban Buffer Zones of 5340 hectares, were sent to the township municipalities of Beşiktaş, Sarıyer, Üsküdar and Beykoz only for information and inspection as predicted by the Bosphorus Act. In July 1988, The İstanbul Branch of the Chamber of Architects applied to the First Administrative Court for the cancellation of the Master Plan with the scale of 1/5000 and its supplements, which had been prepared for the Backscene and Buffer Zones of the Bosphorus. The First Administrative Court took a decision for the cancellation of these plans based on the expert reports in January 1995, on

the claim that they contained planning decisions adverse to conservation rules. Unfortunately, during this period, it was observed that a large number of "green areas" had been turned into "settlement areas" by the local authorities under the political pressure.

So many efforts made, so many conservation decisions and measures taken, a number of acts passed and several plans prepared in order to protect the natural and the historic values of the Bosphorus Area. Unfortunately, the Bosphorus area has now become a political and legal battlefield between those who want to protect it and those whose interests lie in the area and who are after obtaining high profits by owning a piece of valuable land and/or by means of high density building construction. Arrangements made to secure protection and planned development have been too often changed by the central and the local authorities under economic and political pressures, especially before each general election. Although legal objections to these changes made by professional organizations and academic bodies have at times been successful in reversing the decisions, considerable damage has been done in the periods that elapsed in between the contradictory decisions.

However, some of the current problems encountered in the Bosphorus Area stem from the complex and unstable policies caused by the rather frequent changes made in the planning decisions. The fact that under economic and political pressures the planning and conservation policies fail to adopt a comprehensive planning approach. All these problems should only be solved by adopting multi-dimensional and stable policies that do not contradict one another.

It is clear that, conservation decisions and planning policies should be consistent with other regional and urban planning decisions and policies. Conservation plans should be integrated with the existing or newly produced development plans for the other sectors of the city. It should be accepted that bans and prohibits do not work and that some construction should be allowed however limited.

The planning activities should be carried out with meticulous care; then a working system of implementation and inspection, which would not be affected by political pressures and changes, should be established.

Regarding the significance of natural, historic and urban sites and their potential in the development of the Bosphorus, the related parties, the central government, the local administrations, the scientific institutions, the planners and the people living there, should adopt common and consistent policies.

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