

# ***Determination of Losses In Urban Transformation Example of Sulukule***

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## **Abstract**

It is a common issue for many cities over the world to maintain and preserve any historical and cultural assets by means of physical, social and economic improvement of the blighted zones created by the outmoded historical centurms that are far from meeting the today needs, unsecure, and prone to disasters. In Istanbul, one of the zones that need to be preserved is the Neslişah and Hatice Sultan (Sulukule) district in the historical peninsula. This settlement has recently undergone radical changes by the urban transformation project. This study aims at elaborating any historical, cultural, economic and social assets of the old district inducing large scale changes in the Sulukule District, followed by a theoretical clarification of the urban transformation, urban renewal definitions, types and application methods. The samples studied include a number of world cities including Alberobello in Italy, Nuremberg in Germany, Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Safranbolu in Turkey, which are all comparable to the changes experienced in Sulukule. The regional history, the “Roman” population living in the settlement, and the pre- and post-transformation settlement are analyzed to determine any possible losses of historical, social, economic and cultural assets due to the project in question.

## **1. Introduction**

The Historical Peninsula in Istanbul has hosted many civilizations throughout the history. It has a unique heritage with her civil architectural examples and monumental works as well as historical and cultural texture extending from the past to the today in Turkey and over the world. This historical and cultural texture has failed in completing its development and change due to the lack of care and maintenance for many years.

As a result of the same negligence and destruction, some obsolete ruin and rubbish zones. In addition to the physical collapses in such zones, a number of social, economic and cultural problems have emerged. It is another risk for such obsolete zones to be prone of earthquakes. One of such zones in the historical peninsula is the historical Haticesultan and Neslişah (Sulukule) District. The district had been recently restored with the historical and cultural works adjacent to the

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historical territories. Among such restorations, Sulukule is to be particularly elaborated, as it takes place on the preservation zone of the territorial waters of the Peninsula of Istanbul, i.e. the world heritage fields, and in the oldest “Roman” settlements over the world, and is the first field of this process of initiating the large-scale urban transformation in Istanbul.

**Objective:** The reason of elaborating the urban transformation in the Sulukule District is that the possibilities and rights of the people of a specific zone are not improved, but just extorted as to annihilate the historical assets. The comparable changes in Turkey and over the world were elaborate to analyze the Sulukule District.

**Scope:** For the study were selected the Sulukule, Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Districts. In the theoretical framework, some literal searches were carried out on such concepts as the city, urbanization, urban restoration and urban transformation, and the arguments on such concepts were elaborated. In this context, the urban transformation was taken into consideration for its purpose, legal grounds, fields and methods of applications in Turkey and over the world. Some information was given in regard to the preservation areas in the urban transformation. The history of the urban transformation project in Sulukule and the examples In Turkey and over the world were studied in this paper. The physical situation of the region was elaborated, and compared with the old photographs, and some searches on the historical heritage were made to form a basis for the study. Discussions were held with the Resettlement Projects Management and the Project Survey Management of the Municipality of Fatih in Istanbul, and the old and new resettlement plans were obtained to examine the pre- and post-transformation situation, intervention process as well as the social, cultural and architectural characteristics.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The urban restoration and transformation are not solely concepts, but represent a very comprehensive conceptual approach. And the planning tools used for “transformation” are explained within the framework of the concept of urban restoration. For the time being, the urban transformation in Turkey is implemented like in Sulukule and many other places in the city, where it covers streets, building islands or a portion of a district, completely independent of the integrated urban plans. When a urban transformation project becomes independent of the urban plans, and partially implemented as to break ties with the city complex and the project environment, it results in a complete lack and ignorance of planning and functioning (Süleyman Balyemez).

### 2.1. Objectives of Urban Transformation

The urban transformation has emerged to serve for six basic goals (Yıldırım, 2006):

- Improving the urban welfare and life quality, and increase the income level of the centrums with the aim of enhancing the economic competitiveness of the cities;
- Establishing relations among the physical conditions and the social issues to diminish the social isolation;
- Adopting multi-stakeholder urban policies and participative planning in line with the democratic trends;
- Efficient use of the urban areas as to prevent unnecessary expansion and profusion as to protect and improve the environment;
- Getting the areas of transformation integrated with the entire city;
- Meeting the need of continuous change intrinsic to the urban areas.

## 2.2. Legal Grounds of Urban Transformation in Turkey

Following are the laws and acts that form the legal grounds of the urban transformation projects as well as any other projects implemented under different names, but with the same approach.

- Resettlement Act No. 3194,
- Resettlement Amnesty Act No. 2981,
- Act No. 5104 on “Northern Ankara Entrance Urban Transformation Project”,
- Act No. 5366 on “Restoration, Preservation and Sustainable Utilization of the Damaged Historical and Cultural Immovable Assets”,
- Section 73 of the “Municipalities Law” No. 5393 of 2005, and
- Act No. 6306.

## 2.3. Implementation Zones of Urban Transformation

The implementation zones of urban transformation are classified in the following headlines:

- Shanty zones,
- Zones gained upon dislocation of the industrial fields from the centrums,
- Centrums,
- Zones probe to disasters and urban risks.

## 2.4. Implementation Methods in Urban Transformation

Below listed are the headlines of implementation methods:

- Urban preservation
- Urban improvement
- Urban renovation
- Urban restoration
- Urban revitalization
- Gentrification

## 3. Examples Of Urban Transformation Over The World

In this study are elaborated the actual improvement, transformation and preservation

projects on the basis of a number of examples, e.g. Alberobello in Italy, Post World War-II Nürnberg in Germany, Mostar City in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Safranbolu in Turkey with the aim of defining the accuracy of using the basic concepts in the course of transformation and preservation.

### 3.1. Alberobello in Italy

Alberobello is a small town in the Province of Bari in Italy. It is known with the old buildings constructed in 1500 Trulli form. The Trulli's are the stone buildings with conic roofs. The old texture has been being preserved in the course of preserving historical assets by the Alberobello Transformation Projects. Alberobello is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1996. The Trulli's are currently used as housings, stores, restaurants and accommodation facilities. The preservation and gentrification of such old assets have attracted tourists from all over the world, whereupon the living conditions of the district people have been improved in economic respects.



*Figure 3.1 and 3.2. : Transformation Project in Alberobello, Italy (www.italyheaven.co.uk).*

### 3.2. Nürnberg in Germany

Like many German cities, Nürnberg is attached to the State of Bavaria. The city was damaged in the course of global military conflicts from 1939 to 1945, i.e. the World War II, involving a majority of the world countries. Being one of the Roman-German Empire centres, Nürnberg was restored after the war. The city was rebuilt after the war, and regained her pre-war appearance, including the re-building of some medieval buildings.



*Figure 3.3: Centrum of Nürnberg, 1950, Figure 3.4: Post-war restorations in the World War II destruction centrum of Nürnberg (www.stadtalas-muenchen.de).*

### 3.3. Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mostar is the biggest and most important city in the Region of Hersek in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Though the city suffered a terrific damage during the 1992-1995 civil war, it is still an extraordinary site of the European cultural heritage. As the oldest texture is the resettlement area surrounding the Mostar Bridge, it just forms the oldest urban texture in the city (Özyaba, 2004).

The buildings damaged in the city were repaired, and the historical works were restored after the war. The destructed Mostar Bridge has been rebuilt by the Company “Yapı Merkezi” in Turkey, for which the foundation, body walls and floors have been



restored, keeping faithful the genuine works. In the Conservative Resettlement Plan for Mostar takes place the Historical Bridge integrated with the Marketplace and historical districts, where the urban texture around the historical bridge has been handled as a part of an integrated system.



**Figure 3.5:** Post-war Mostar

Figure 3.6: Mostar Today ([www.bosniavolimte.blogspot.com.tr](http://www.bosniavolimte.blogspot.com.tr)).

The housing zones in the old urban texture have been rehabilitated with the outmoded parts of the city being restored (Özyaba, 2004).

### 3.4. Safranbolu in Turkey

Being a town near Ankara, Safranbolu is a specific town that presents the historical and cultural works of the traditional Turkish social life in the city scale. Her rich cultural heritage and her success in preserving the same heritage have made Safranbolu a world

city (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey).

As the town was announced as a urban preservation site in 1975 by the Supreme Board of Preservation of Cultural and Natural Assets, the deserted cottages have been converted into such facilities as hotels and restaurants, and the initial steps have been taken to restore the monumental works, so that the handicrafts sank into oblivion have started to become famous once again. 1.008 historical works have been registered in the old centrum that has been announced as a preservation site of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage.

A resolution for preservation of Safranbolu was taken in the late 1976. By this initial resolution for preservation (Ahunbay, 1998), it has been stipulated to:

- Declare any applicable cultural, historical and social grounds, and determine the prerequisites for transitional reconstruction works till the implementation of a planned preservation, and
- Determine the structures to be preserved, and take actions for preserving the road form elements, road pavements and road textures, garden walls, and their natural scenes, and
- Keep the infrastructural elements under supervision.

Doğan Kuban reported the purpose of the preservation plan in 2001 as follows: Realizing the contemporary needs within the limits of the historical site existence, while meticulously preserving all the features and characteristics of the historical texture (Anon, 1998).



**Figure 3.7 and 3.8:** Appearance of a historical building in Safranbolu before and after the preservation attempts (www.forumcad.com) (www.karabukrehberi.net).

It is important for the people to recognize the value of their own assets, so that an old cultural asset could be preserved. In this context, the people of Safranbolu are aware of the fact that a house or cultural asset gets a higher material value than the comparable ones when it is preserved in its genuine form. In Safranbolu, the traditional lifestyle of the Turkish community has been reflected in the city scale, which has allowed well preserving the regional historical and cultural assets and rich heritage.

#### 4. An Example Of Urban Transformation In Turkey: Sulukule

Sulukule, is a district that takes place at the lowest point of the ramparts between Topkapı and Edirnekapı in the Historical Peninsula of Istanbul (Figure 4.1).

#### 4.1. Historical and Cultural Settlement of Sulukule

The first settlements date back to the Byzantine Era in Sulukule that takes place adjacent to the terrestrial waters of the historical peninsula of Istanbul, where the district people then dealt with such activities as fortune-telling and wizardry. In the Ottoman Era, the other Roman people living in some other places were invited to the district as a result of the attempts to refresh the life in Istanbul. At that time, the Roman people dealt with the music and dance, and the houses were first influenced by the State pressure against the music, dance and entertainment houses in the Republican Era, and therefore many of such places were closed (UÇAN, 2011).



**Figure 4.1:** Sulukule Area (google Maps)

#### 4.2. Sulukule Urban Transformation Project

Having a high importance for the natural, historical, cultural and archeological heritage within the historical peninsula announced as a “Urban and Historical Site” by the Resolution No. 6848 of July 12 1995 of the “Cultural and Natural Assets Preservation Board No. 1” of Istanbul, “Neslişah and Hatice Sultan District (Sulukule) has been announced as a Restoration Area as per the Council of Ministers Decree No. 26147 of April 22, 2006, effectuated upon publication in the Turkish Official Gazette No. 26318 of October 13, 2006 under the Law No. 5366. The area was revised as to cover the Neslişah and Hatice

Sultan Districts for the projects implemented by the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul, Municipality of Fatih and the Public Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) in 2005. The restoration site, taking place adjacent to the Land Ramparts between Edirnekapı and Vatan Street and within the boundaries of the Rampart Preservation Line, occupies an area of 91.731,46 m<sup>2</sup>. In the project site takes place 12 islands, 378 lots, 10 districts and 3 streets. For renewal, an adequate number of housing units were included in the project for production on the land of 13 thousand square meters owned by the Municipality of Fatih (Municipality of Fatih).

Following the destructions in Sulukule, TOKİ called a public bidding for construction on the basis of the preliminary designs, and the Contractor “Sulukule İnşaat” started the construction activities. Within the framework of this project, total 577 housing units of 75, 100 and 120 square meters have been built up in 165 blocks.

In the course of the implementation of the Sulukule District Restoration Project, the district people had to leave the social and cultural environment occupied by them for many years, and some part of them removed to Gaziosmanpaşa, Balat and Edirne, and 337 families to The TOKİ housings in Taşoluk and Kayabaşı. Some 5 thousand Roman citizens were determined in the region, and 3 thousand 500 Romans (703 landlords and 303 tenants) were removed from the district before the destruction activities. As a result of the wrong policies, they removed to Karagümrük, their old quarter, just before the end of one ear. Many Roman families lived together and side by side in the housings attached to each other in the form of small rooms, and reflected this form of solidarity even in their spatial organization.

Mr. Şükrü Pümdük, the President of Sulukule Roman Society has not sold the house remaining from the grandmother of his father, and applied to the Court, saying “Whatever they pay... They annihilated my culture. How one could measure it with money”, and the lawsuit is yet pending. Saying “They ended up the entertainment industry. I started to work in Taksim. How could I return to Taşoluk at 3 o’clock night time? It costs 100 liras to take a taxi, and it is my earning for the day”, the musician of the Sulukule Roman Orchestra could withstand in Taşoluk with his family only for one month. As the rental fees are 300 to 450 liras in the TOKİ housings, and the total living charges reach some 1500 liras with the central heating, monthly apartment fees and transport charges, the Sulukule District migrants mostly had to return ([www.kentseldonusum.info](http://www.kentseldonusum.info)).

According to the UNESCO Standards, the rampart surroundings are required to survive, and be preserved, not only with their physical assets, but also with the cultural texture and old assets, there is a need for Sulukule in the ramparts included in the World Heritage List to be preserved under the appropriate conditions.

While the old Sulukule was a poor but vivacious part of the city, it has now turned into a dead mass housing site. Though the quarters around the zone keep vivacious, Sulukule is now sterile and independent of its surroundings.

The villa-like buildings have been arranged in the apartment format, and each building has three flats, each of some eighty square meters. The buildings have been designed to have oriels to fit the old building concept. Two big buildings, a shopping mall and a school, were constructed in addition to 665 housing units, so that the shops and stores of the streets of



the old district have all been collected in one shopping mall. While the Sulukule district was not only a housing field, but had the nature of an economic and vibrant touristic and cultural district of music, dance and entertainment houses, only one music and cultural center was built in the new district.



*Figure 4.2: Transformation Project in Sulukule (Municipality of Fatih).*

Following the process of transformation for 6 years in Sulukule, the property owners moved to their houses, only one half in size of their old houses, and had to endure debts just equivalent to the total cost of such constructions due to the difference of value for extra charges and expenses. Furthermore, the lottery drawn among the stakeholders result in random assignment of the buildings and housing units to the old building owners. And the new district habitants raise objection to the membership fee of 230 liras collected in the new housings.

It explains why the low and medium income level people of Sulukule prefer hiring or selling the housings rather than residing there.

- The Rampart Preservation Band determined by UNESCO was reduced to one half in the Project.
- The specific island morphology and street texture were not preserved.
- The public areas were opened for building in the project, and the street sections were enlarged.
- No green fields and parks were assigned.

The formed building typology does not fit the existing street texture and registered structures.

### 4.3. Old Building Characteristics of Istanbul and Sulukule

Before implementation of the Sulukule Urban Transformation Project, the old buildings were characterized with the wooden frame and mud brick filled one or two story buildings called “nogging” houses (Yapı Olgusu, Mimarlık 81/11-12).

It is an old method used in the villages and towns throughout Turkey. The “noggin structure, namely mud brick filling in the wooden frame” has been very frequently applied, and is still used. Figure 4.2 (Bilge, 2006).



*Figure 4.3: Former Architectural Feature of Sulukule; nogging structures with wooden frame*



#### 4.4. Decision for Cancellation of Sulukule Urban Transformation Project

Claiming that the destructions and reconstruction of the project buildings on a preservation site are contrary to the resolutions of the Preservation District Board, and that the property rights of the Roman people are violated, the Istanbul Büyükkent Branch of the Chamber of Architects under the Union of Turkish Chambers of Architects and Engineers (TMMOB), and the TMMOB Chamber of Urban Planners Istanbul Branch and the Association of Roman Culture Improvement and Solidarity filed lawsuits for cancellation of such projects. As the Court denied to decide on the interruption of implementation, and then the Administrative Court finally annulled the project due to the lack of public benefit upon application of the Municipality of Fatih in 2012. Meanwhile, all the buildings were destroyed, and the project was completed in spite of the court verdict on annulation (Sulukule Platform).

#### 5. Evaluation And Conclusion

Over the world, the zones outmoded in time and creating problems due to the lack of maintenance are restored to improve the lifestyle of the local people through the renovations performed through the urban transformation projects. However, the wrong policies may sometimes cause some losses due to the restoration interventions. One of such examples is the Sulukule District that takes place within the historical peninsula of Istanbul. Having been announced as the “Site of Urban Renovation” as per the law No. 5366 in November 2005, the Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Districts (Sulukule District) have been subjected to many wrong operations, and now considerably destroyed with the district people forced to migrate, whereupon a new project has been implemented, completely independent and irrespective of the old district. In this study is tried to elaborate the cultural

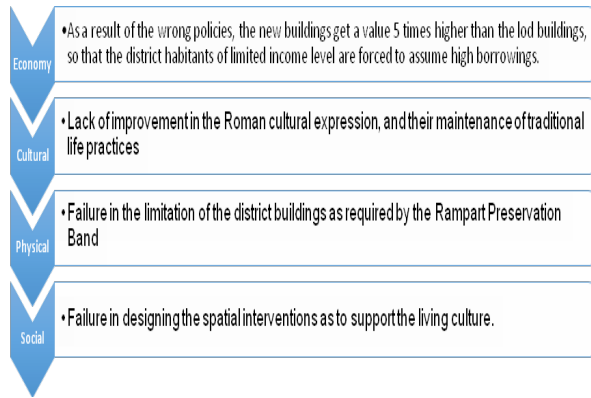
and historical heritage of the Roman people the quarter habitants within the framework of the architectural features of the new buildings and the actual effects of the process launched with the urban restoration project in Sulukule. The evaluation of economic, cultural, physical and social criteria through the field work performed in the new Sulukule and the negotiations with the Municipality revealed some losses.

In terms of the **economy**, the habitants of the old Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Districts were dislocated from their own heritage and removed to some other places before, but returned to their old districts after completion of the project implementation, but they were forced to sell the new buildings due to their borrowing to the municipality and banks as a result of the value difference between the old and new buildings, while some of them hired their new housings, so that the old Roman people had to resettle in different streets of the district. As the new buildings are not appropriate for the people of Sulukule to maintain their lives, it has harmed the regional people.

In **cultural** aspects, the Roman people as an important characteristic element of the district need to gather and live in the old Sulukule region just in the centrum, so that they could keep up with their ties with music, dance and arts. Before destruction, they were resettled in the TOKİ mass housings in Taşoluk, but could not resettle in the new housings due to the wrong policies and interventions upon completion of the project, so that they have remained landless. The concept or urban transformation has created such problems as the lack of land, and loss of cultural characteristics for Sulukule and the Roman people.

For the **physical** and architectural respects, the renovation project currently implemented in Sulukule has been developed and realized without respect to the history and cultural heritage of the old district. The entire regional history has been destructed, and the new housings built up in the completely flattened field are not similar to the historical Sulukule houses at all. No measure has been taken to limit the structuring in consideration of the Rampart Preservation Band, so that the ramparts and buildings would be in a good harmony.

Following are the losses caused by the Sulukule Renovation Project:



In this context, the interventions to be made in the districts to be transformed should not be limited to only one street, lot or district and their surrounding fields, but implemented in consideration of satisfying the fundamental needs of the region, and maintenance of a strong infrastructure and humanistic values by means of an appropriate planning.

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