

Urban fragmentation and class struggle

The phenomenon of gated communities in Istanbul emerged in the 1980s in the course of economic liberalization and the establishment of new building laws. Since this time this previously unknown urban form experienced a massive boom amongst large parts of Istanbul's urban population, which often is described as the "new middle class", _opposing to the old republican elite_ which experienced rapid social and economic uprising with the take over of the neo-liberal party ANAP in 1984. The class of the nouveaux rich was assembled from members of various social, cultural and political backgrounds and demonstrates a relatively high number of migrants, who as workers, had come to Istanbul in the industrial period of the second half of the 20th century and »made it«. Therefore it forms a group of people who's belonging is defined by financial capital and not as antecedently common practise, by being born into social circles where education, social and political practise are dominated by very particular guidelines.

The origin and history of the new urban elite is crucial to a theoretical approach to gated communities, since it holds answers on both political and socio-economic practises in the urban development of today. As Orhan Esen describes it, the cultural political and social fragmentation amongst the middle class is the basis to the urban fragmentation of the city. He states that throughout the development of the urban environment "permanent, generally accepted patterns and tools of ideological legitimization are missing, due to the incoherence of the new class". »Esen in: "Public Istanbul" (Eckardt F./ Wildner K. 2008) «

I will therefore approach the gated community on this basis of cultural fragmentation and accordingly fragmentary urban practises, in contrast to the notion conveyed in descriptions of the gated community as emerging from the discrepancies between the urban poor and the upper classes who are in worry about their capital and personal security.

Such an approach is considerate of lifestyle and class behaviour as researched by Pierre Bourdieu and re-embeds consumerism and commodity into the realm of culture. (Yael Navaro-Yashin)

From this perspective the gated community in Istanbul can be seen as a new form of cultural practise that is a continuation of cultural consumerism and market innovation enabled by privatisation and market-aiding policies established during the Özal-government¹ after the coup d'état.² In the 1980s consumerism became the new form of expression and cultural identities were consumable in commodity form. Under Özal political action was co-handed with market innovation which fostered the design of lifestyles for a, in terms of consumerism more and more fragmented urban society.

As these socio-cultural dynamics became a major focus of investment companies and public developers that embedded capital accumulation into urban development strategies, living ones identity fundamentally began to afford differentiation between go and no-go areas and that differentiation formed a basis for a rather dualistic vision of the city.

These establishments of localized informational cultures did not emerge out of security demand, but from class and socio-cultural polarizations in Istanbul's contemporary history, which have evolved into a fully fledged war over culture and identity taken out in the urban arena.

The black and white vision of the city amongst people affiliated to one particular cultural group is often mistaken with a form of duality that is based upon evaluations that divide Istanbul into a concurrency of well-off gated suburbia and culturally not agreeable *gecekondus*³. The wording of duality has been used by a range of writers on Istanbul's urban development without the use of a common denominator. (compare Bilgin (2006) and Aksoy and Robins (1995)) and is highly misleading in terms of understanding the historical backgrounds of fragmentary development processes. As Navaro-Yashin states, "the dualistic narrative of Istanbul's history of class relationship is worrisome because it produces a tendency to interpret every political conflict flatly onto the distinction between the very wealthy and the very poor." (Navaro-Yashin 2002) Also does the gladly adapted vision of Western researchers _of secularist/ Islamist distinction that allegedly dominates the development of many Eastern countries seem to fit with the notion of duality and fuels a myth that establishes itself further in Western thought.

In their article "Istanbul rising" Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy exemplify another vision which is the most blinding for the complexity of economic and political involvement in dynamics of cultural development. By describing Istanbul's urban landscape as a coexistence of two separate cities, "one that is engineered from above by urban elites and one that rises from below as a result of cultural dynamics" they render culture as distinct from the realm of commodity and in doing so displace the information society from processes of globalization and urban renewal processes in favour of technological-, and infrastructural modernization. The gated community however is precisely what governments imply by »enabling globalization processes and propagating modernity« through urban renewal and transformation. A direct involvement of public housing companies like Toki, Emlak and Kiptaş in the growth of gated communities in Istanbul demonstrates these alliances. Hand in hand with private investors these public agencies play a major role in superseding formerly developed forms of community and housing through renewal processes enabled by new building laws.

By now, many of the old neighbourhoods from the 20th century have been transformed into new gated housing projects, but those who's home had become subject to urban renewal procedures have been resettled in alleged social housing projects that also are peripheral and gated. What we experience is therefore not a sea of distorted urban sprawl that is re-conquered by a salutary army of gated communities but an entire fragmentation of the city and its periphery. The mere difference between cultural acceptance and non-acceptance in the eye of the transformer may be the directing of the surveillance camera towards either the inside or the outside.

1_ Turgut Özal was president of the Republic of Turkey in 1989-1993 2_ The 12. September 1980 Turkish coup d'état, headed by Kenan Evren, was the 3 coup in the history of the Turkish Republic after 1960 and 1971. 3_ *Gecekondus*: meaning landed over night/a house autonomously built on state-owned land by predominantly Turkish migrants, with the means of private capital

Identity and urban cultural practise

The city of Istanbul is now preparing for 2010 the year of the European Capital of culture. This occasion and the changes needed for a transformation into a city of services have evoked a number of large projects that are focused on areas that are not just badly facilitated or economically inferior but also fundamentally seen as not appropriate for representation on the global market. Together with ECOC also a more focused interest in Istanbul's historical core came into being which was seeking for possibilities to upgrade and replace large areas in the city centre that grew to be densely populated through autonomous urbanisation processes before the change of government in the 1980s. Favouritized by Turkish migrants areas such as Kasimpaşa, Tophane or Beşiktaş are now ill-reputed for being areas riddled with crime and miss-culture, where danger to urban security is verified through high numbers of ethnic minorities, rural cultural habits and poverty alone.

Simultaneously however these are the same areas that happen to be the childhood neighbourhoods for many people who now see themselves affiliated to the new urban elites. Amongst urban right activists these connections have inspired ideas of »planners to erase their own shameful socio-cultural memories«, on the list of arguments against urban transformation.

Besides reasoning and motivation it remains without doubt that an expansion of the gated lifestyle will soon reach the inner areas of the city of Istanbul, transforming not just urban space but also urbanity into segmentary ways of life. The issue of new laws for urban renewal and reformation of politics in EU-harmonization processes is supportive of legal loopholes that enable abrogation of building guidelines, protecting the skyline and historical building material. "The application of the recently adapted law "5366", for the so-called "sustainable use of downgraded historical real estate through protection by renewal" which exclusively applies to areas with historical listed building stock will soon result in the construction of more gated communities in Istanbul's historical core." so Esen and Rieniets. (Eckardt F./ Wildner K. 2008)

In accordance with EU-harmonization transformation processes are also affected on a level of style and branding strategies. These strategies put sustainable renewal under the banner of »Europeanizing« the city. What exactly it means to »Europeanize« however is only being touched on the surface of the image, non-inclusive of according political practises. The idea where complex political action is taken out strictly on the level of the visual must be evaluated as a materialization of thought that is worrisome for the practise of democracy in the Istanbul of tomorrow.

As transformation commences increasing the demand for gated housing a large range of construction projects are settled under names such as "Amsterdam Yaulari" or " Paris Residence". Admitting that the image that is produced in association with the new neighbourhood does indeed recall European characteristics, it must be seen however that they tend do be restricted to decorative features, and marketing strategies. The internal spatial structure is oriented much more upon introversion, multiple access enabling grids are replaced by cul-de-sacs, and public space is redundant. Europe in its spatial tradition is far away, replaced by what are in fact thoroughly eastern cultural features.

Other than the contradiction between spatial order and architectural styles we can find a range of indicators within the gated community that would undermine its status of community as a social group that would engage in active negotiation within and through the space that they occupy. The traces of use in the gated community do not tell of inter-communal-engagement. Typical for other areas in Istanbul that represent vivid communal activities and strong community bonds are clearly the visual merging of the spaces that characterize the private and the collective realms. Boundary lines would be changeable and negotiable and open spaces would be claimed for semi-private or temporary collective purposes.

The rigid boundaries between building plots restraining the occupation of space to the privately owned household is reliant on the lack of social and political interaction as cultural form of practice and sign for a community constellation that is based solely on the representative powers of the image. That means that the image, and that applies to the visual appearance of the gated community as much as it would apply to its 2-dimensional counterpart in the marketing brochure is not the result of direct action on behalf of the neighbourhood crowd but representational of it_ and therefore what we call, a symbol. Community has taken on a new format, one that is spatially displaced and processed for the communication on visual-technological levels.

To understand both the tools of the gated community as cultural form of practise and its roots within the particularities of society we will have to unlock the interactive processes behind image production. These involve an analysis of social-cultural histories, politics and economic frameworks, before embracing the ambiguity of the image which, through semiotical analysis shows its underlying social, political, historical and economic dynamics, but also acts upon itself through its implications of reading, perceiving, consuming and communicating.

Cultural techniques myth and urban space

To express affiliation to certain cultures and identities by consuming its symbols is an idea much described in academic text and word since the definition of the symbolic economy and the detection of the commodification of culture. The apparent re-writing processes of symbolical languages and their circulation through the means of new information technology on the other side has not been discussed in a sufficient manner in the context of evaluating new technologies for the task of knowledge production in the city.

There clearly is a demand to grasp issues of urban democratic governance through deconstructing the mechanisms underlying cultural-technological change that can trigger social conflict and polarization through pattern of consumption and in- and exclusion- on a level of education, affluence and political mainstream. Keeping in mind the information society on one hand and Turkey's process of EU

integration on the other, these issues are highly relevant in particular for articulations of Europeanization and modernity in the context of urban technological cultures.

Attention must also be paid to the reductive effects on information that is circulated through various forms of media and that is responsible for the mystification of what essentially is European and what is not. As can be observed in the case of Istanbul, the priority of image and branding mechanisms in the production of urban space surely are supportive of types of cultural fragmentation that are based on the distortion of reality.

To give an example for the confusion and its consequences caused by reductive information circulated through various forms of media we can refer to the interpretation of the Turkish inner-political conflict on the basis of the headscarf. Attached to a religious symbol political action and decision-making on behalf of the Turkish party AKP has been read and understood in certain geographies of media-networks as something intrinsically tied to movements of Islamic fundamentalism.

Responsible for interpretations of this kind are above all the appropriation of religious symbols that in a process of iconisation and marketing have taken on a signified that no longer is based on its scientific and intellectual history. When analysing the pragmatic content of the signified it is obvious that the wearing of the headscarf as an expression of affiliation to certain religious, traditional or conservative values has become a reactionary act of revolt against the old republican elite that has radicalised itself in political undergrounds using the powers provided by the media to beat its competitor.

The belief that the new urban elite who propagates neo-liberalism and accommodates globalisation has subscribed itself to enter into a war of religion amongst Islamic fundamentalist and terrorists has not come out of the blue but emerged from the dependency upon a mythical implied symbol to tie together a group of people that is torn between non-acceptance from the EU and political aversion against nationalist tendencies.

Competing with the west on the market for global cities the Istanbul elite is led to define its identity primarily through opposition to western culture while simultaneously striving to catch up with the western style. (compare: Sen 2006)

This contradiction, suggesting that the Islamic population is no longer defined by Islamic belief but by its dependency on the definition of the west, has given birth to the most astonishing cultural statements that are essentially absurd in their communication of values.

Current value is the primary concern that regulates styles and brands on the consumer market. _In the 90s Muslim clothing companies discovered the market value of the headscarf spearheading a new Islamic fashion, symbolic for both the affiliation to Turkish traditions as well as the success and drive of the modern Turkish woman. They veil, interpreted as new form of sexiness however is essentially a contradiction to the Islamic way of life and serves only to compete with Atatürkist symbols in a market war over identities.

This fundamental displacement of symbols and styles from their original context is found equally in the production of space evoked by mechanisms of branding strategies, and that particular in gated communities in and around Istanbul. Methodologies of traditional semiotical analysis can therefore no longer be employed for the understanding of culture through an interpretation of space, for it would render nothing but discontinuity with local cultural history. The simultaneous rise of “Chinese”, “European” or “Ottoman” neighbourhoods in Istanbul however is entirely uncontroversial for an understanding of the underlying dynamics of globalization. Opposingly it demonstrates quite plainly the ephemeral and metaphorical nature of the visual sign in the media. Accordingly the images used in the production of urban space in global cities are widely interpretative, subjective knowledge that is peripherally time- and culture- bound.⁴

Global informational exchange has created informational milieus that have disembedded symbols from their local origins to put forward an idea of locality that serves as identifier for the members of that milieu when participating in the global network. Informational milieus are therefore neither strictly local, nor totally disembedded from their local roots, which leads us back to the idea of duality at the beginning of this paper. When analysing the mechanisms that produce technological cultures it can be proven that there is no such conflict as the one evoked from the local and authentic retreating from the destabilizing forces of globalization or vice versa, the globally networked who redeem from their local roots as member of a new global society.

⁴ Duration of validity can be made concrete with the apartment house in Istanbul. During the 60s a symbol for social uprising through small-scale entrepreneurship it fell victim to a change in value systems and therefore in planning and was soon replaced by the family villa of the early gated garden cities that emerges in the 80s. After a time period of but a few decades the apartment block was generally accepted as representational for social backwardness.

Evaluations

Large scale gated communities, like those evoking our associations with our European neighbour-captals are momentarily still restrained to areas close to the city edges. Until now free plots of land in the center of Istanbul remain unavailable which on the other hand has resulted in violation of the city's forest and water-catchment areas. The growth of illegally constructed gated communities has in recent years put a lot of stress on the ecological stability of the metropolitan region. Already the sizes of the water reservoirs in the north are estimated to be of too narrow a margin to supply the growing population that is estimated to expand significantly until the year 2050.

Before the public the worry about water and resources as ecological issue is undervalued, compensated by what is another primary risk in the years to come. The threat of the next Marmara earthquake to destroy vast areas of central Istanbul has occupied the mind of planners and politicians and has encouraged the engineering of laws to facilitate stabilization of dilapidated privately owned housing. Besides the point of urgency to ensure the security of people in predominantly self-built

neighbourhoods, little information has reached the public that informs about methods of reconstruction. There is reason to forecast the new law that has yet come into effect, as worrisome for the implementation of participatory processes with the local communities. As most post-gecekondu⁵ areas do not feature inner quake-resistant steel-structures, accomplishment envisions the entire destruction and re-construction of the building material. Past examples of participatory rebuilding-projects in Istanbul have demonstrated that former inhabitants are likely to be outpriced from their land through the cost of renewal processes, enabling governments to resell the land in favour of what is in fact a transformation process into gated communities for the affluent in central Istanbul. To place these processes in a context of discussion where they are understood as a materialized form of cultural practice and conflict in the age of globalisation does help us understand sequences of knowledge production that inevitably lead to illuminating the effective powers of the media in its influence on informational cultures and to identify the actors and their motives along with the processes of media-circulation and reception.

Maybe we can contribute to a more sustainable process of urban transformation by de-mystifying the gated community as ephemeral symbol for communal life in the city and reanimate the practises that are intrinsically tied to the creation of real public space.

5_The post-gecekondu is a definition by Orhan Esen and refers to a gecekondu which has been upgraded to an apartment house by a small-scale capitalist enterprise founded by the owner of the gecekondu and a person who has the know-how to construct a multi-storey building. The profit in form of living-space is then shared between the two. Most areas within central Istanbul are post-gecekondu areas. For more information see Orhan Esen in "Self service city: Istanbul"

Bibliography

- A**ksoy, Asu & Robins, Kevin. Istanbul Rising in: European urban and Regional Studies (1995)
2(3) 223-235
- Ayata, Sencer. The middle class and the joys of suburbia in: Fragments of culture: The everyday of
modern turkey, Deniz Kandiyoti & Ayse Saktanber. (2002) IB Tauris, London
- B**ayca, L.T./Gülümser, A.A. (2004): Production and marketing of Gated communities in Istanbul,
ERSA conference papers from European Regional Science Association.
- Barthes, Roland. (1992): Mythen des Alltags. Edition suhrkamp sv.
- Bilgin, Ihsan. Die Doppelstruktur Istanbul in: Esen, Orhan & Lanz, Stephan. (2005). Self Service City:
Istanbul, B_books, Berlin
- E**ckardt, Frank. Wildner, Katrin. (eds.)(2008). Public Istanbul, spaces and sphere of the urban.
Bielefeld, Transcript
- Esen, Orhan & Lanz, Stephan. (eds.)(2005). Self Service City: Istanbul, B_books, Berlin
- G**enis, S. (2007) Producing Elite Localities: The Rise of Gated communities in Istanbul. Urban
Studies, Vol.44, No. 4 pp.771-798
- Glasze, G. (2006) Private Cities, New York
- Gottdiener, Marc (1997). Postmodern semiotics, material culture and the forms of postmodern life.
Blackwell
- K**eyder, C. ve Öncü A. (1993) Istanbul and the concept of world cities. Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Publications
- N**avaro-Yashin, Yael. The market for identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities in: Fragments of
culture: The everyday of modern Turkey, Deniz Kandiyoti & Ayse Saktanber. (2002) IB
Tauris, London
- S**en, Amartya, (2006) Identities and violence/The illusion of destiny. Allen Lane. Penguin Books.
London