

## MEMORY LAYERS IN ARCHITECTURAL, NATURAL AND URBAN HERITAGE: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL BOSPHORUS CONSERVATION AREA

NURAN ZEREN GÜLERSOY<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Natural and urban heritage of the Bosphorus with its ecological and cultural layers that reflect the environmental, social, spatial, and political meanings are the major elements of personal and collective memories and also the identity of Istanbul. However, in conditions of rapid urbanisation, cultural and natural values of the Bosphorus have been experiencing the pressures of the Metropolitan City of Istanbul since the 1970s in particular.

Accordingly, emphasising the importance of the Bosphorus with its contribution to the cultural and natural values and urban heritage of Istanbul, the main aim of this study is to determine and evaluate the effects of the conservation and development decisions, on the memory layers of the city throughout its development history.

**Keywords:** Bosphorus, urban conservation, urban memory layers, cultural heritage

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bosphorus is a unique spot of natural beauty in that it both separates and unites the two continents, namely Europe and Asia. Starting from the ancient times, it has acted as a bridge between the East and the West serving as 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr., Department of Urban and Regional Planning, İstanbul Technical University, İstanbul



**Figure 1.** Situation of the Bosphorus

The land behind the coastal strip of the Bosphorus has a sudden and steep rise from the sea level. The slope which is 10% on the European side reaches up to 30% and beyond at places. On the Asian side, the slope around 5% increases towards the further north. The steeper hillsides are naturally covered with bushes and woods (Agat, 1963). The topographical characteristics of the Bosphorus, i.e. the fact that there are few large plains and that the hillsides are rather steep, have affected the use of this area, together with the choice and the development of the settlements since ancient times.

Although the first settlements on the Bosphorus were located on the small flat pieces of land where the detached valleys are opening up to the waterway in harmony with nature, these villages later on gradually climbed the hillsides (Zeren, 1976). Unfortunately, today, the settlements on the Bosphorus are rapidly escalating from the hillsides towards the hilltops and destroying the historical and natural environment, thus damaging its unique beauty.

## **2. HISTORICAL URBAN LAYERS OF THE BOSPHORUS AREA**

Early settlers on the Bosphorus were religious communities; the Byzantine Period that gathered round the first temples and chapels; however, these small communities gradually grew into small villages, and with the coming of the Turks, these settlements gained in economic and cultural significance. In the Ottoman period, the Bosphorus acquired the characteristics of a favourite summer resort, and thus the number of the settled areas increased. After the 1950s, the social and economic changes in general, and the rapid increase in the population of Istanbul have forced the Bosphorus to turn into urbanised areas.

### **2.1. The First Layer: Early Settlers on the Bosphorus**

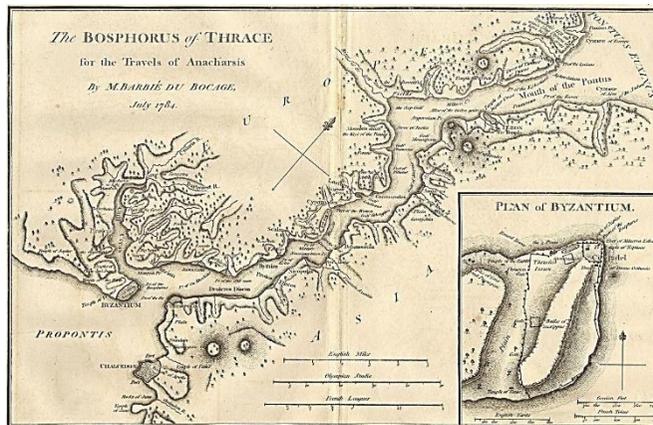
According to research findings, there were no significant settlements on the Bosphorus area before the Byzantine period. The number of archaeological findings from this period has been very few indeed. Information about life on the Bosphorus in the ancient times is derived mostly from legends, stories and mythology, and only a few of which have been documented. The word of Bosphorus also comes from mythology. The first word "boos" means "ox" in Greek

and the second word "phoros" means "crossing". According to Greek Mythology, one of the Goddesses, disguised as an ox had crossed the strait; thus the early Greek colonies called the place "Bosphorus", meaning "ox-crossing"(Gökbilgin, 1992).

The people of the colony living on the Black Sea were thought to have prayed and made offerings to the Gods before setting out to the sea. There were temples and shrines on the hillsides protected from the wind and at the bottom of the valleys or on the banks of the rivers into which small boats could enter. It is highly probable that the first settlement on the Bosphorus, "Chrysopolis (the city of Gold)", was established on the steep hillsides of Scutari, as a far off wharf connected with the settlement of Chalcedon, which had been identified as the first settlement of Istanbul, established between the Kadikoy Bay and the Kalamis Bay (Çubuk, 1994).

## 2.2. The Second Layer: The Byzantine Era

It is known that the Bosphorus had great significance as a passage-way in the Byzantine era; however, there is not much information about the history of the settlements on the two shores. It is estimated that there were no large settled areas in this era; and the few settlements that existed were small villages, religious buildings, palaces and monasteries detached from the main urban settlement. In these small villages, existing independently of Byzantium and living on agriculture and fishing, there reportedly were some hunting and summer kiosks and a large number of monasteries and churches (Figure 2) (Eyice, 2007).



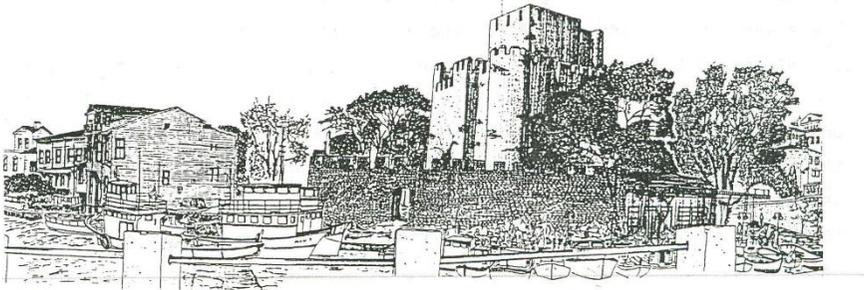
**Figure 2.** The Bosphorus and the City of Byzantium  
<http://www.constantinople.org.uk/Prints/Constantinople1850.jpg>

## 2.3. The Third Layer: The Ottoman Imperial Period

During the Ottoman Imperial period, villages on the Bosphorus turned into larger settlements consisting of summer resorts with yalis and palaces on the coastal strip and permanent settlements and farms in the inner parts relatively far from the coast. After the Ottomans had conquered Istanbul (Mehmet the Conqueror) in 1453, the first Turkish quarters were established around Anadoluhisari (Figure 3) and Rumelihisari. Later, a new quarter emerged in Baltalimani, and the Christian villages remaining from the Byzantine era continued their existence.

In the XVI Century, the Bosphorus underwent a significant change in that it began to be used as the summer resort area by the court and the high-ranking state officials. In fact, during the

reign of Suleiman the Magnificent a big palace was built in Cengelkoy; and during the reign of Murat III, several summer palaces were built in Kandilli and Beykoz. In the time of Selim I, the Bebek Park was arranged with a small summer palace built in it; during the time of Selim II, the Buyukdere Park in Büyükdere and Feridun Bey gardens in Emirgan were well-known summer resorts (Kuban,1973).



**Figure 3.** Anadolu (Anatolian) Fortress (Nuran Zeren)

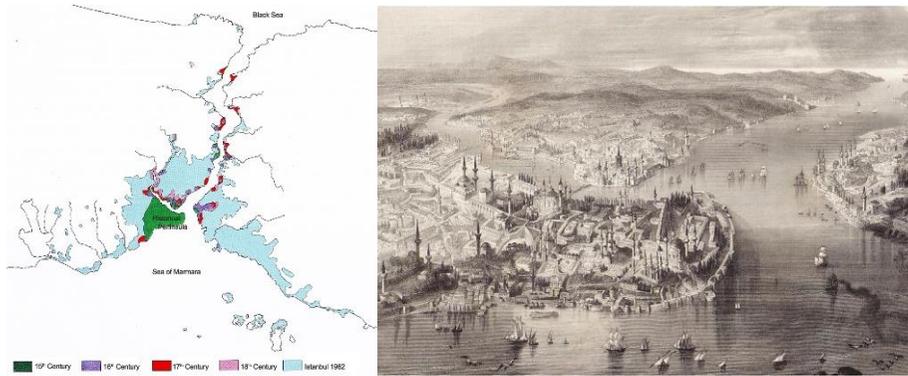
In the XVI Century, the need for transportation grew, and the regular boat services had been started between the two sides of the Bosphorus. There were shared passenger boats running as well as private ones. Moreover, in the XVII Century sea transportation provided a significant part of the intracity transportation and the state tried to supervise the boat services as much as possible (Mantran, 1986).

In the XVII Century, the settlements gradually took over the Bosphorus area, which had now begun to lose its exclusive character of being a suburb. In line with this, Tophane which is at the starting point of the Bosphorus area had turned into a large urban settlement comprising seven mosques and a large shopping area in Salipazari. In the time of Ahmet III, the West coastline of the Bosphorus was covered with the mansions and yali's of the courtiers from Salipazari down to Bebek; and the East coastline had approximately a hundred small palaces and kiosks mostly situated in Scutari ( İnciciyan, 1976).

From the XIX Century on, it can be observed that the Bosphorus has become the favourite summer resort area with foreign embassies. A good example is Tarabya, a popular picnic area in the XVIII Century, which became the summer abode of the foreign embassies in the XIX Century. Moreover, Buyukdere, which was a favourite green area and amusement place during the reign of Selim II, turned into an area where embassies had their yalis built, and the European fashions and traditions were displayed (Kuban, 1996) (Figure 4, Figure 5)

On the other hand, at the beginning of the XIX. Century, the most harmful functions industrial usage were seen in the Bosphorus area. In 1810, Beykoz Leather and Shoe Factory was built in Anatolian Side and extended in 1822 (Doğan, 2013).

By mid-XIX Century, quite a large system of sea transportation had been developed to connect the villages on the Bosphorus, the quarters of Uskudar and Kadikoy and also the coastal villages on the Sea of Marmara both on the European and the Asian sides. Later on, this system was further developed to connect the coastal villages to the urban trade centre in Karakoy and Eminonu. Getting more and more centralised, the sea transportation system on the Bosphorus put the connections between the coastal villages in a secondary position. At the beginning of the XX. Century, the network of ferryboat transportation was added to the system to enable motor traffic to continue without any interruption. Istinye shipyard was established in 1912.



**Figure 4.** Spatial Development of the Bosphorus during Ottoman Period

(Kuban, 2004)

**Figure 5.** Historic Peninsula and The Bosphorus, 1840

<http://www.constantinople.org.uk/Prints/Constantinople1850.jpg>

#### **2.4. Fourth Layer: After the Foundation of the Turkish Republic**

The foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 became a turning point in the evolution of the Bosphorus area as well. The disappearance of the Ottoman courtiers, who were instrumental in the development of the Bosphorus environment, and the slow increase in the population of Istanbul prevented the development of the settlements on the Bosphorus.

In the 1930s the main industrial facilities were developed, and new factories were opened in the Bosphorus. Paşabahçe Monopoly Spirit Works was established in 1934, and the Pasabahce Glass Product Factory was built in 1935; both owned by the public sector. Another critical industrial facility exists in Beykoz was the Beykoz Leather, and Shoe Factory was handover to Sumerbank in 1933, which again belonged to the public sector (Tümertekin, 1973). The Fuel Depots in Cubuklu were the most harmful facilities built in the same period, as they pose a constant threat of fire to the whole area.

Up to the 1950s construction activities on the Bosphorus, the area had been rather slow, and even the yali owners had difficulty in keeping up their property. After the 1950s construction and/or widening of the roads had been undertaken, and with the coming of the new sea transportation facilities the Bosphorus, the area came to be a more attractive location for the industry and related settlements. The other reason for the industry to develop in the Bosphorus area in these years was the adoption of the "Plan for Industrial Zones". With the 1955 Istanbul Regional Plan for Industry, Pasabahce was encouraged to develop as an Industrial Area by the State Planning Authorities (Duranay, 1972).

On the European side, the Istinye Valley was formerly accepted as an industrial area and opened to the construction of industrial facilities in 1969 (Tümertekin, 1973). The Istinye Shipyard, operating on and around the Istinye Bay since 1912, plants and factories along the Istinye Stream and squatter settlements of the workers employed in these facilities continue creating problems for the environment. Moreover, in Buyukdere, which is one of the major bays on the European side of the Bosphorus, industrial plants producing electrical equipment, durable steel goods, car parts like exhaust pipes, etc. are situated in the valley. The adverse effects of the mislocated development can easily be seen both on the European and Asian sides of the Bosphorus (Doğan, 2013).

The largest and the high-density squatter settlements in the Bosphorus area coincide with those sections where the industrial facilities are the most commonly found. Squatter areas on the

Asian side have appeared in Beykoz, Incirkoy, Pasabahce, and Cubuklu, all of which have industrial facilities. On the European side, a similar phenomenon can be observed, where the squatter areas concentrate around the docks in Istinye and Hisarustu (Zeren Gulersoy, at all,1999).

## 2.5. Current Layer: After the Bridges

Today, the Bosphorus is under pressure created by the Metropolitan Istanbul, which is going through a phase of rapid transformation regarding urban intensity and expansion. The rapid increase in the population of Istanbul, forces the rural and natural make-up and history of the Bosphorus to turn into urbanised areas. In this process of unexpected urbanisation, historic settlements and natural spots are being replaced by luxury dwellings and concrete apartment and office blocks as demanded by high and middle-income groups and real estate market; and some other parts of the Bosphorus are still being covered by squatter areas by low-income groups.

On the other hand, after the construction of the three suspension bridges over the Bosphorus built in 1973, in 1989 and in 2016 and their related motorways, the use of land on both sides have been strongly affected. The bridges and related motorways have destroyed the green areas on the hillsides and brought a rapid development of housing and related functions. The first and second 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 (Figure 6).



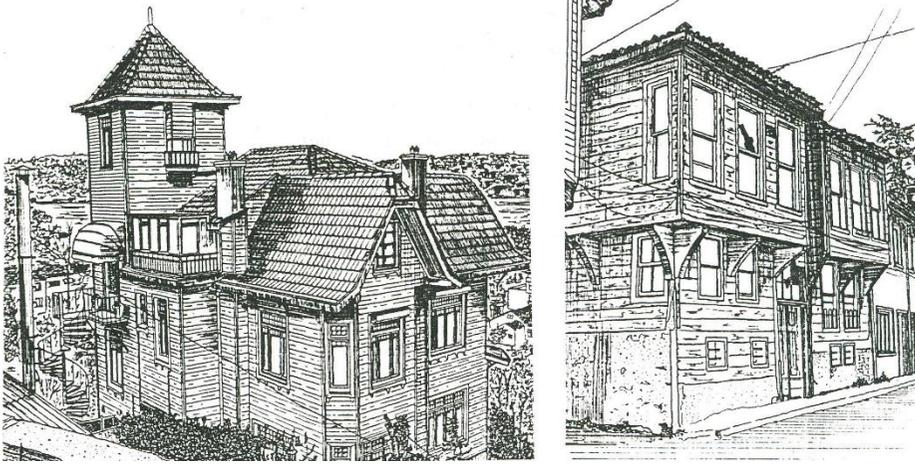
Figure 6. Three Bridges on the Bosphorus

Under these circumstances, the Bosphorus is in danger of losing all its natural and historic urban layers and collective memories under pressure caused by the planned and/or unplanned rapid urbanisation and the unhealthy artificial environment caused by hectic construction development

## 3. PLANNING AND CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN THE BOSPHORUS AREA TO PROTECT THE IDENTITY OF THE BOSPHORUS

The most distinguished memorable characteristics of the Bosphorus area are the greens, woods, parks, the curving coastlines, the green valleys, the picnic areas, historical values,

villages, yalis, wooden houses (Figure 7, Figure 8), the low waterfronts, and the promenades. In the framework of the Istanbul Master Plan, the Bosphorus Area was accepted as a "conservation site" so as to protect these characteristics. In this site, which was to be protected as an organically whole landscape and used as a recreational area, the priority was given to the Coastal Zone remaining between the coastal road and the sea.



**Figure 7, Figure 8.** Examples of the first and second group civil architecture in the Bosphorus (Nuran Zeren)

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

### **3.1. The First Attempts to Protect the Bosphorus Area:**

The first attempt to protect the Bosphorus area was a decision dated October 10, 1970, for the listing and designation of the historic yalis of the Coastal Zone (SCIAM/5595, 1970). 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 (SCIAM/6442, 1972).

The Bosphorus area was first taken up as a planned conservation site with the Coastal Zone Conservation Plan in 1971 of the scale of 1/5000 (Bosphorus Development Office, 1971). This plan, however, comprised only the coastal strips on the Bosphorus and stipulated that the existing historic yalis and other historic buildings (Figure 9, Figure 10) should be designated and 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 metres would be allowed (Bosphorus Development Office, 1972)

In 1973, with Law 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) (Eski Eserler Kanunu, 1973).

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 that the manner of using private parks would be decided according to the decisions of SCIAM (SCIAM/8172, 1974).

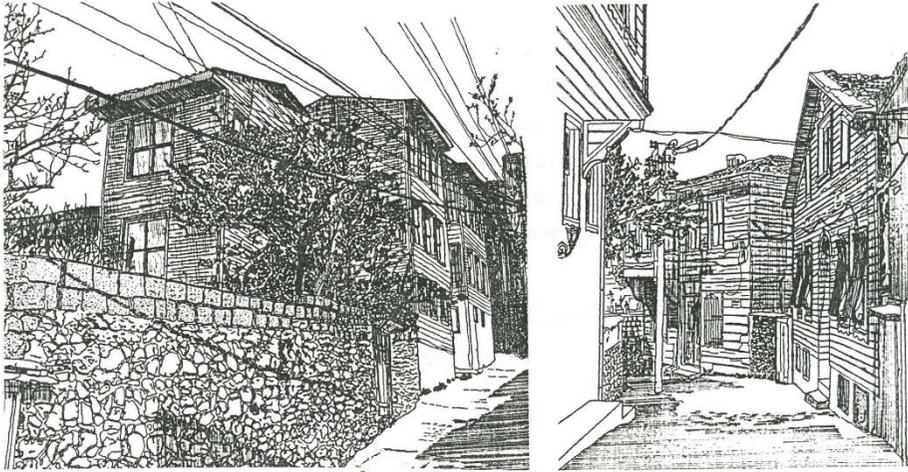


Figure 9, Figure 10. Examples of the timber houses in the Bosphorus (Nuran Zeren)

### 3.2. The Master Plan for the Conservation of the Bosphorus

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 1979 (SCIAM/8036). 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 regulations (1978, 1979, 1980 1/5000 Master Plan Revision Report).

A new plan prepared according to some new principles was approved and brought into implementation in 1982 (Report of the 1982 Plan). In this new plan, the Bosphorus area had been divided into four sections as the Coastal Zone, the Foreseen Zone (total 4300 hectares), the Backscene Zone (1000 hectares), and the Buffer Zone (5300 hectares), and the building height had been limited to 9.50 metres. 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. This Cabinet decree stipulated that no new building permission would be issued until a new master plan, and a development plan with the scale of 1/5000 and 1/1000 had been prepared in order to prevent and rearrange all kinds of new developments that would otherwise destroy the historical and natural beauty of the Bosphorus area, and that would also encourage the population density. Only the repairs and restoration work on the listed buildings would continue; woods and greens owned by the municipality would be given the "forest statute"; land owned by the Treasury would be protected and kept green, and industrial plants would be removed.

The Cabinet decree also predicted that the Master Plan and the development plan for The Foreseen Zone would be completed within a period of three months. Therefore, a planning committee consisting of the members from the Municipality of Istanbul, from the Greater

Istanbul Master Plan Office, and from the Bank of Provinces prepared the Master Plan with the scale of 1/5000, and the Conservation Development Plan with the scale of 1/1000 for the Coastal and the Foreseen Zones,

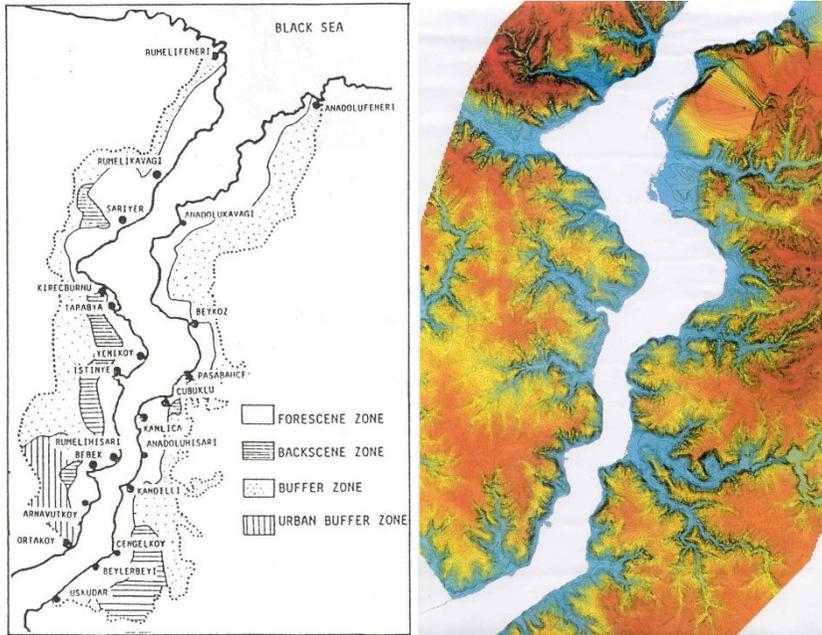
### **3.3. The Bosphorus Law No 2960**

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 Law 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 Law concerning a special area was issued, which came into force as the Bosphorus Law No 2960. The aim of this special new Law was to protect and develop the historic and natural values of the Bosphorus for the benefit of the public and to limit the number of those types of buildings which would encourage population intensity. A new organisational scheme was established for the conservation, planning and implementation of the Bosphorus with this specific Law. The aim of this scheme was to define and arrange the conservation and building regulations to be applied specifically to the Bosphorus area. The Bosphorus Law No 2960 stipulated that the construction of new houses would be completely banned on the Coastal and the Foreseen 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 (Figure 11, Figure 12).

The Bosphorus Law No 2960 specified that, as a first step, those facilities like quarries, kilns, etc. spoiling and damaging the natural beauty should be closed down. The environment damaged by the closed- down facilities would be re-arranged so as to be restored to its original natural state. Then, the coal and fuel depots, the docks and the plants would also be removed from the Bosphorus area.

The Bosphorus Development Office had the authority to carry out the arrangements and the implementations. Therefore, some of the facilities that have to be removed from the Bosphorus area are the Sumerbank Leather and Shoe FLawory (in Beykoz), the Glass Products Factory (in Pasabahce), the Fuel Depots (in Cubuklu), the Plywood Plant (in Anadoluhisari), the Oil Plant (in Vanikoy), the Match Plant (in Istinye), the Brick Plant (in Buyukdere), and the Coal Depots (in Kurucesme). The Coal Depot is the only facility that has so far been removed. All the depots, warehouses and offices on the Ortakoy- Kurucesme section of the coastal strip were removed in 1986, and this cleared section of 14 000 sqm was re-arranged as a green area and a public Park (Archives of Greater Istanbul Municipality).



**Figure 11.** Allocation of the zones in the Bosphorus Conservation Area  
**Figure 12.** Natural Characteristics of the Bosphorus Conservation Area

*The Coastal Zone:* The coastal strip following the curves of the Bosphorus waterway.

*The Foreseen Zone:* The geographical area connected to the coastal zone where the most impressive landscape of the Bosphorus area is situated; this zone consists of the inner space on the Bosphorus area which has priority regarding conservation and is limited by the highest skyline as seen from the Bosphorus.

*The Backseen Zone:* The geographical area separated from the Foreseen Zone and the inner space of the Bosphorus; this zone adds depth to the inner space and is limited by the patterns forming the outer lines of the Bosphorus area.

*The Buffer Zone:* The zone consists of the space remaining outside the Coastal, Foreseen and the Backscene Zones of the Bosphorus area; which is divided into two as the Rural Buffer Zone and the Urban Buffer Zone (Bosphorus Law/ 2960, 1983).

The Construction Law No 3194, Clauses 46,47,48 and Provisional Clause 7: While conservation practices and new developments were being carried out as stipulated by the Bosphorus Law No 2960, a new Law, the Construction Law No 3194 was brought into force, which led to some changes in the Bosphorus Law No 2960.

### **1988 Bosphorus Back Scene Zone and Buffer Zone Master Plan Revision**

Covering the Back Scene Zone and Buffer Zone regions 1/5000 scale Bosphorus Master Plan Revision was prepared in 1988. With this plan, open spaces have been opened to high-density development. In the same year, UCTEA (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) CAT (The Chamber of Architects of Turkey) filed a lawsuit for the cancellation of this plan on the grounds that “the plan was not aimed at conservation” in the Istanbul Regional Administrative Court. Based on this Master Plan Revision, 1/1000 scale development plans have been prepared by the district municipalities independently until the litigation process was

completed in 1995. In the process, the integrity of the planning has been completely lost and a period of partial revisions has been experienced. Consequently, despite the objections of the UCTEA, The Chamber of Architects of Turkey - Istanbul Metropolitan Branch for the cancellation decision because “the same mistakes were continuing increasingly” they have been rejected by the Turkish Council of State. (Gülersoy Zeren, N., 1998)

#### **1/5000 Bosphorus Back Scene Zone and Buffer Zone Master Plan Revisions and 1/1000 District Development Plans of 1991-1992-1993**

As explained above, while the lawsuit for the cancelation of 1988 Bosphorus Back Scene Zone and Buffer Zone Master Plan that prepared by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality was continuing, the approval process of the new 1/5000 and 1/1000 scaled plans was started which were based on the revisions of the 1/1000 scaled development plans prepared by four district municipalities (Beşiktaş, Sarıyer, Üsküdar and Beykoz) independently. The approval process of Beşiktaş, Üsküdar and Beykoz parts of 1/5000 scaled Master Plan Revision have been completed except Sarıyer district. Accordingly, based on the plans which have been prepared independently in 1991-1992-1993, a new 1/5000 scaled master plan proposal has emerged. Hence, examining it in detail it has been observed that the main objective of the four development plans of the district municipalities was opening the region to settlement and solving/legalising the illegal housing areas but not to conserve natural, cultural and historical assets of the Bosphorus really (see fig. 2 - 3) (Selçuk, Z., 1992, Zeren Gülersoy, 1995)

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

As has been explained above, this paper aims to find out the effects on the Bosphorus Conservation Area of the planning and conservation decisions and legal arrangements, whose aims were conservation and planned development. In this section will be discussed the facts related to the practices of the last five years during which the adverse effects of the decisions became increasingly visible in the Bosphorus skyline.

For Istanbul, 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 historical and cultural values inherited from the Byzantine and the Ottoman times together with the contributions of the people presently living there. 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 ‘grooving pains’ which the other similar metropolitan cities of the world have gradually undergone in a much longer period.

The Bosphorus area has also been affected by the phenomenon of rapid urbanisation and population explosion taking place in Istanbul, and owing to the newly added transportation facilities like the three bridges and related motorways; unsuitable building developments began to take over the land whose economic value has gone up considerably.

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