

STRATEGIC URBAN DESIGN: A STRATEGIC PLANNING APPROACH IN CONSERVING SPATIAL IDENTITY AND SPECIFIC QUALITIES OF PLACES

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PROLOGUE

It is interesting to observe that the urban spaces which are found no more liveable by their inhabitants, are mainly created through a process of that we call now "**planning.**" In most of the planned urban transformations, *the definition and meaning of place is changed, the unity of place-memory and identity is lost*, at the expense of further economic interest and declaration of power. (BILSEL, 2004)

It is known what the intention is behind these implementations, which are mostly presented to people as a way to give a new identity by renewing the existing character of urban fabric, which is found contrary to the new one.

As a result of this "*tabula rasa*" type of understanding which eradicates the pre-existing, with an expectation of excessive profit however, what is reached at the end is, a highly dense and unhealthy urban structure, a non-articulated urban image and a no more readable urban pattern without authentic identity. It would not be wrong to say that, the possible outcome of this sort of urban planning which accepts and use the geometric urban pattern as its main design principle, results in an urban-erosion.

Having mainly a visual character, spatial images which are perceived, conceived and collected in memory for being recalled and remembered later on, are associated with the objects presenting an authentic image in space respectively. Collected memories are related with the values and entities that make the authentic space, in which people walk through in their everyday life, perhaps without being aware of them.

The City, which has been the creator of civilizations, is an existence presenting herself with a series of landmarks. Together with the historic settlement pattern, existing cultural values, remnants of vernacular architecture, the authentic urban silhouette and also with meanings and names of places, memories, old sayings and stories are all collected in the people's memories. Conservation of the cities with all the cultural values and urban architectural heritage which have left traces worth to remember in citizen's life, representing authentic features of identity, is accepted as one of the most important subjects of the last fifty years. However, large scale

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urban demolitions have become a current practice not only in this country but also throughout the world.

It is now observed that, existing cultural values in urban areas disappear from sight one by one, as a result of ever changing intentions of urban municipalities to such an extent that their demands change the cultural identities of cities along with the profit oriented pressures on the limited urban land.

While every action of demolition gives way to a new borne building on the very same piece of land, however the possible effects of these operations onto the people living in these quarters are not taken into consideration at all. This reminds us barely perceptible visual images which would gradually disappear from our sight.

In such a case, in which a new development with high densities replaces previous built up environment with particular meaning and identity, the result is new petrified urban spaces having lost their green existence, with changing scale and proportion and without sufficient open space.

It is the urban memory, which is effected from the ever changing appearance of urban space and the urban values which cannot be protected properly.

In these circumstances, *“the memories of the past”* which cannot be conveyed visually to the new generations, are going to be left as re-collected memories only in the old men’s mind vanishing as time goes by. Memories of the past mean nothing but odd stories any more. (AKPINAR, 2011 & 2012).

What is really intended to do is, changing the urban identity and re-defining people’s perception through creating *“a new urban image”*. In order to prevent this, what could be done is, first to inform people about the various inadequacies and problems of such dense and chaotic built environments resulted by the process of continuous demolition and renewal, before suggesting alternative solutions.

In this context, it is rather important to explain to people that, it is possible to provide them with more liveable places in terms of healthy environment with arrangements, while protecting the existing cultural values in an active way. It is an interesting argument that, the awareness of citizens about the values of the historic settlements and architectural heritage, could indeed be achieved by designing healthy urban spaces.

STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING APPROACH AND PLANNING FOR STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS²

In terms of the possible solutions on which we can argue, I would like to present here an application of “Strategic Spatial Planning Approach”. A planning approach which we developed and could find the opportunity to follow its implementation phases, is adapted to Urban Conservation Planning. By using this model however, **“Planning for Strategic Priority Areas”** is developed together with the definition of the **“Particular Points of**

² Summarised from a previous work of the Author:

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The original terms, **“Planning for Priority Areas”** and **“Particular Points of Interest”** are quoted from the unpublished Ph.D. Thesis of the Author.

Bilsel, S.G., (1987) “Öncelikli Alan Planlaması” ‘*Planning for Priority Areas*’ Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Gazi University, Ankara.

Interest” chosen and which the boundaries were determined according to a planning decision taken in the upper level.

At first, it would be emphasized here that, the spatial strategic planning approach can be used not only in the planning of the upper level, but also in the planning of priority areas in the local levels with the objective to direct the implementation.

The method that we propose here is, producing “The Strategic Priority Area Planning for Protection of Historical Urban Spaces and Further Development Areas” in terms of particular points of interest having priorities in which the techniques of “**urban design**” are used thoroughly.

One of the important dimensions of the method we use in this context, from the social planning point of view, concerns the citizens who are expected to become conscious by comprehending the existing values of vernacular historic areas, simply by discovering the possible relationship between historic past of the city and their own everyday life and as a result by taking part actively in the conservation efforts.

The aim of this study is to bring forth a new and a different approach to planning that is responsive to integrated, comprehensive and rapid changes within the system according to the dynamic planning understanding. Confronted with the ever-changing requirements of cities, the static "traditional planning approach" is now proven to be inadequate, resulting in piecemeal arrangements isolated from the planning as a whole.

The conceptual base of '**spatial strategic planning**' model was first introduced in the beginning of the 1970s. This model, which considers planning as a function of strategic urban management, adapted to spatial planning through a series of "**strategic choices**" explained by "**the decision theory.**" In planning practice this approach means making a choice among all the probabilities related to the future by decreasing uncertainties within the system. (GALE, 2001).

In planning, it is quite usual to come across several **uncertainties**. Within the strategic choice approach, there are two ways to explain and overcome those uncertainties. To reduce and to control them better, it is necessary to trace back their sources, or to rearrange the system flexibly in order to adapt it to changes. In this purpose, the distinction between short term and long term planning is to be made. Thus, while the removal of uncertainties is preferred in short term, in the long run, flexible solutions need to be developed in order to increase the system's openness to different possibilities. This approach is defined as the basic philosophy of strategic planning.

In spatial strategic planning, a technique called '**scenario planning**' is used. “For a probabilistic definition”, linkages between scenarios and strategies must be established. Through scenarios a milieu for predicting and understanding possible uncertainties is created, and in strategic decision making, scenarios help to come up with a common understanding through negotiation and reconciliation of opposing views within the group. (Van der HEIDEN, 1996).

The suggested model is a **two-stage planning approach** within the system of relationships. In that way, a planning process depending upon continuous interrelation between upper and lower levels of planning is defined in spatial strategic planning. In this model there is a '**structure plan**', that is a high level plan in which the basic strategic choices and principle decisions are made, and strategic priorities are defined; together with '**plans for strategic priority areas,**' which are local level, implementation oriented plans defined by the same structure plan.

Spatial strategic planning, which defines a reflexive planning process within the system, includes a **strategic goal and development objectives**, a future development scenario and

basic strategic choices that are defined on the basis of that scenario. In the upper level of strategic spatial planning, several applicable '**alternative development strategies**' are created based on different space and time settings. Those are evaluated by using various methods to reach a selected alternative development strategy.

'**Planning for priority areas**' is a unique tool, designed according to a development strategy and defined priorities for a better understanding of the problematic potential and developmental dynamics of space usage and differs from traditional planning methods with its emphasis on "**priority**".

In planning for priority areas, demand analyses and projections are made. In this approach it is accepted that the weak might be just as important as the strong in spatial power relations. Detailed proposals are made to direct the implementation according to **programme choices** that are based on these analyses. Multidimensional and detailed arrangements are proposed **through 'urban design projects' of different scales.**

At first, in the urban design projects developed for the strategic priority areas defined in accordance with the basic principles of the upper level structural plan proposals, the **operational objectives** directly oriented to development are defined.

Secondly, possibilities and constraints, as well as the social, physical and administrative thresholds and restrictions, which are existing in designated areas, are all taken into consideration.

Then, the demand analyses, projections and the **programme choices** are formulated by the active participation of local people.

The detailed projects, developed in different scales and dimensions at the end of such a participatory process, also propose implementation models, opening discussions on fiscal dimensions and implementation phases of the project, that are taken into consideration within *strategic priority areas*, and *particular points of interest* in this context. This design approach is named as "**Strategic Urban Design**".

STRATEGIC PLANNING APPROACH AND URBAN DESIGN IN CONSERVING THE SPATIAL IDENTITY AND SPECIFIC QUALITIES OF PLACES

It is particularly important to use the spatial strategic planning approach **in urban conservation planning schemes**, which aim at sustaining tangible and intangible cultural values and existing settings of historical urban settlements while protecting them.

The conservation of cultural values within the historic urban environment, including historic monuments, remnants of vernacular architecture and historic market places, has to be considered within a holistic approach in this context.

In strategic planning model, among the defined strategic objectives of urban planning, the objectives which are related to the conservation of natural and cultural values of the city have to be considered important. Conserving the values of the **authentic silhouette** and **original townscape** of historic urban spaces and defining new functions to old historic quarters are **critical objectives of planning.**

In the evaluation process of the alternative strategies of urban development, the principles about **conserving authentic spatial identities, original urban image and special qualities of places** are among the **significant criteria** used.

The following stage in the urban conservation planning developed by using the strategic planning approach is, to determine the **strategic priority areas** and **particular points of interest**, for which the urban design projects are to be proposed, by defining the priorities and also the periods of implementation of these projects respectively.

In the **strategic urban design projects**, which are to be conducted in the strategic priority area and the particular points of interest within those, besides strict conservation decisions, it is expected to produce **alternative design proposals** opening discussions on such implementations as getting rid of hazardous additions, **revitalization and rehabilitation of the historic environment** and/or allowing new developments compatible with it.

In the urban design process that are to be developed in the strategic priority areas and the particular points of interest, **organising urban design competitions** which are open to multi-disciplinary participation can be seen as an appropriate method in order to allow various proposals.

The strategic urban design projects are expected to serve in the conservation of authentic values of the historic city and the **spatial identity** which have marked the memories of the citizens. In this respect, adopting a participatory process as part of **the strategic urban design** becomes vital.

COMING TO AN END: “READING THE STORY OF PLACE IN A RIGHT MANNER” TO BRING “A STRATEGY OF CULTURE”

In a Conservation Planning model, which aims to prevent demolitions and deteriorations of urban space, social and spatial disintegration within it, it is suggested to bring forth and protect the local authenticities, defining an Urban Identity with its dominant features (BARTU, 2000). It seems to be rather important to bring forth a “Strategy of Culture” in order to provide an effective conservation and revitalization scheme, while commencing a new usage in ‘Place’ and vernacular architecture within the historical urban environment. What is aiming in terms of “Urban Culture” in this Strategy, which can be expressed as “reading the past stories of Place in a right manner”, restoring without losing the sense of identity, and ensuring the “Cultural Continuity” by means of history and space, is defining a new way of life and a quality of life respectively. (WANSBOROUGH & MAGEEAN, 2000).

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Research Interests:

Urban Spatial Identity, Urban Memory, Creating a new Urban Image, Urban Conservation Planning, Strategic Spatial Planning Approach, Strategic Priority Areas, Particular Points of Interest, Strategic Urban Design.

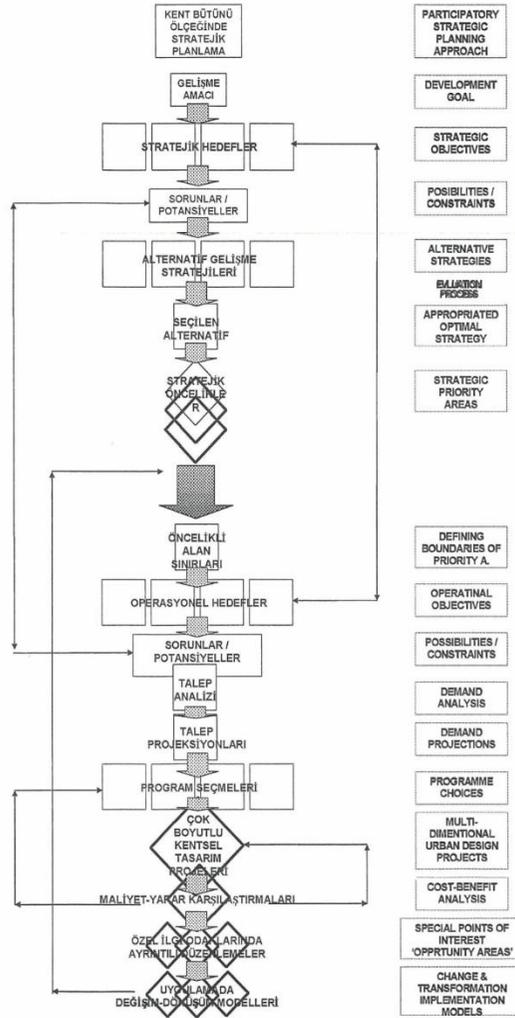


Figure 1 Strategic spatial planning approach & planning for priority