Merging boundaries, techniques and experiences

Hashas-Degertekin, Mine [1]   Sahin, Murat [2]

Abstract   An international urban design workshop was conducted with students from a US and a Turkish Universities for 15 days in a waterfront village on Bosporus, Istanbul Bosphorus, a crooked and curved strait dividing the city into two, has traditionally been used mostly for enjoying scenery and nature with its location away from the main trade docks and industrial areas concentrated around the old city center, namely historic peninsula. The strait housed small settlements until the 18th century, during when the royal family started populating the coast with palaces and summer mansions and private gardens and celebrated various festivities. It was a special ritual (Hamadeh, 2009) to experience mansions (yali's, which are perched on the very edge of the bank with boat houses and access) and palaces, mostly timber-frame ornamental structures, and gardens while sailing on the Bosphorus. Later, public spaces, coffee houses, fountains and parks were added to the waterfront development, improving the public's participation in the pastoral culture and transforming these small settlements into connected villages. The pleasure of experiencing the Bosphorus was shared with the whole public through songs, poems, novels and paintings. There were even traditional evening excursions and singing on the boats –caiques- on Bosphorus. Hence, for centuries, Bosphorus has been a socializing space and a sensual experience for many. Despite the fact the quality of the built environment and the way of living has dramatically changed due to the spatial and social transformation in the following centuries, the yalı's and some other contemporary buildings added have continued the dwelling tradition of close proximity to the water. On the other hand, Bosphorus, where used to be a meditative place in the past, has become a natural part of the hectic urban life and architecture.

Focusing on spatial experience, the students attempted to understand and propose solutions to urban disconnect in the urban fabric especially between historic waterfront and inland village. The workshop provided an opportunity for each student to formalize his/her opinion of the place based on individual filters and sensual experiences. This method helped to identify a rich set of perceptual characteristics of the site and resulted in diverse and unique exploration and representation techniques.

The workshop included a guided tour of the historic peninsula and a trip to various waterfront villages on the both sides of the strait, listening to historic and contemporary Turkish music, discussions, and readings such as Tschumi's (1995) ideas on program, movement, and contradiction as well as Sancar's article (2001) on the people's attachment to place through lyrics. This paper consists of a brief description of the place in question, its changing daily life and architecture, and how the students responded to all of these through design and representation.

1. Architecture Department, Southern Polytechnic State University, Atlanta, GA, USA

2. School of Architecture and Design, Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey

Introduction

In the summer of 2010, a small group of undergraduate students from Southern Polytechnic State University in Atlanta, GA of the US and Bahceşehir University in Istanbul of Turkey came together for 15 days in Istanbul, to understand and propose design ideas to urban disconnect between the historic waterfront and the inland village of Yeniköy -a small settlement located on Bosphorous. The workshop provided a learning environment that encouraged the students to independently choose methods of observation, analysis and conceptual design. Acting as flaneurs, based on their level of familiarity with the village and the city, the students discovered (American student) or reconstructed (Turkish students) their individual sense of place in Yenikoy. This experiential approach resulted in identification of different sets of qualities of place as well as diverse techniques of graphic representation. In addition, familiarity of the local participants and unfamiliarity of the guest participants to Istanbul and to the site allowed to record similarities and differences between the two cultures as well as the individuals.

Site

The villages situated at particular intervals along the both sides of the strait of Bosphorous, with their unique topography, morphology, particular typologies and the way of life, provide invaluable basis for training in architecture. One of the villages, namely Yeniköy which means new village, was selected as a site for the workshop. Today, Yenikoy's historic morphology with a development axes perpendicular to the strait has changed by a main thoroughfare parallel to the strait. It divides the settlement into two: waterfront and inland. Timber-framed "yalı"s and new buildings, a small pier, a few cafes and restaurants have been lining in the narrow strip on the waterfront. Preserving the old street layout and pattern, inland comprises timber framed row houses, new 3-4 story apartment buildings, churches, mosques and sinagogs, which reflect the overlapping cultures existed in the same place.

Process and Methodology

Considering the fact that when individuals become drivers of the process, they take the responsibility to build the group culture and connect better through stronger relationships (Bright et al, 2012). Main goal of this cross cultural workshop was to allow students construct their own sense of place, select their own filters for environmental analysis and for formalizing design ideas. Therefore, even though there were structured trips to various sites along with informative lectures on the history of the villages and the historic peninsula, the students were given the opportunity to walk freely and unguided in the villages and the site-Yenikoy. Professors of the workshop acted as facilitators rather than providing strict design guidelines for exploration during both observation and design processes. The dynamic that the process set was helpful for the students with different cultural backgrounds to blend well and work together. The results of this experience based and student driven approach are visible in diverse responses to the site as well as sequential analysis of space with a focus on moments of experience.

Field trips at three scales were organized to provide an opportunity to construct sense of place; a trip to historic peninsula, a tour of Bosphorus villages and multiple trips to Yenikoy. The students were taken to the historic peninsula to see main historic buildings and urban spaces and to understand lifestyle, events and ideas that shaped them. The students were asked to create a collage of sense of place after this first trip (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Initial impressions of the city

Fragmentation in a whole was a common character of most of the graphic representations. They contained cultural diversity, historic buildings, Bosphorus, contemporary figures in the midst of the historic figures, and depiction of contradiction in society, physical environment and architecture. While American students relied on just the observation of the day, the Turkish students expressed moments from their memory such as the colors and elements of dusk at the strait.

During the Bosphorus Villages trip, the students found a chance to observe common and individual characteristics of environmental, physical and social elements of these places. Moreover, they were able to discover the particularities of daily life and urban space from their own point of view. The village trip and Yenikoy visits were programmed in such a way that the students could act as flaneurs (Baudelaire, 1964) and follow their own path of discovery throughout the town. Through a walk that was guided by anything attracted their attention, the students drifted through the environment and became both a part and an observant of the urban stimulus. The most common characteristics that the students recorded were that each village had a small doc, a plaza or kind of a public space by the shore, a market at the coastal plaza or towards inner residential hills, "yali"s, small mosques, and late century apartment buildings side by side with the historic buildings. Among the studies was material investigation of wrought iron used in different styles and purposes in each village and physical continuum in villages both parallel and perpendicular to the straight. It seemed the American students formalized a "one village" image where common characteristics were collaged around a centralized plaza or follow a linear continuum (Figure.2). Whereas some Turkish students again relied on their familiarity with the context and represented how the villages as separate entities are connected with each other through the ferry piers and their buildings.
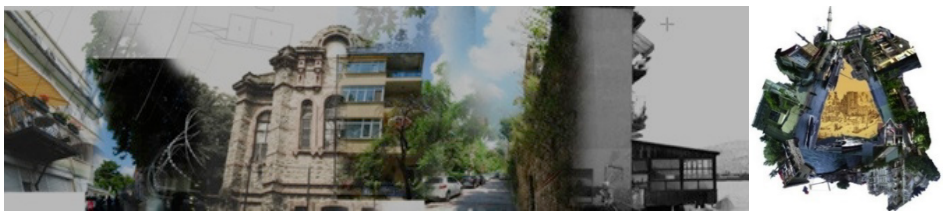

Fig. 2 Initial impressions of the city

In addition to the tours, a lecture on historic development of and sense of place in Bosphorus and Yenikoy was presented to the students. In addition, an article on the songs of Istanbul, which supported the general underlying characteristics of enjoying the scenery, songs and poems in the city, was assigned to the students. The article, "A people's love affair with a place..." (Sancar, 2001) discusses the place paradigm, perception and interpretation of place, and people's attachment to the Bosporus in the past through lyrics. It also introduces vasrious Istanbul songs as a database for investigation. Alongside with this article, another book, which contains a CD, related to music and place "Evenings at the garden of pleasure" (Özertem,T) was introduced. In

addition to the readings, contemporary and traditional Turkish lyrics (the latter from the second half of 19th century to the first quarter of 20th century), and different forms of classical Turkish music were introduced to the students with the aim of supporting the construction of the sense of place and providing inspiration opportunity. After the students formalized an idea of the general characteristics of Bosphorus villages and the local characteristics of Yenikoy, they were asked to read Mahattan Transcripts (Tschumi, 1995) to complement the environmental experience with the concepts of event, program, movement, disjunction and discontinuity. Investigation of these concepts was hoped to guide the students when exploring Yenikoy's current sense of place, which is sometimes in conflict with the historic one that the students gathered from the supporting materials mentioned above. The two senses of place in Yenikoy contradicted especially around flows of movement, program and spatial sequence. Therefore, each student's approach to site analysis and design was defined by his/her individual interpretation of the past and current cultural and daily life in Bosphorus villages and in Yenikoy.

Individual interpretations

Individual "experiences and meanings" about perception of place and place interpretations are, by its very nature, assumed to be multivalent and unique (Sancar, 2001, p. 320). Each student, based on personal motivation and experience, were influenced by different pieces of information from the material provided and by different moments of their drifts during the excursions. Although it was possible to compare the two student groups, the studies rather ended in rich and diverse set of individual interpretations, design approaches and representations.

One of the students looked at Yenikoy in the light of a filter he created during the Bosphorus Villages tour. He realized that each village contained very crowded areas such as the market and the plaza, which felt *chaotic* with the movement, people, and noise. They also contained areas with low action and less elements, which felt *calm* as he walked towards the hills away from the coast. Constructing a continuum of filters, he surveyed Yenikoy according to *calm, energetic, chaotic* and *lifeless* areas, defined each atmosphere by its elements through photographic manipulation and recorded the continuum via plan representation. This approach added a sensual dimension to the existing site plan, which is likely to enable one to have an idea of the daily life through a map.

In addition, he realized fragmentation, separation and segregation in Yenikoy materialized by high walls around buildings, barbwires on garden walls, and the main artery between the hillside residential units and coastal "yali"s. The buildings aligned uninterrupted along the coast also blocked visual and physical access to the strait. In his design proposal, he attempted to create more energetic atmospheres around areas that are segregated or with high historic and experiential value. Consequently, by replacing and displacing the current atmospheres, the student attempted to stitch the disjointed moments of the inner parts of the village to its coast with a new sensual narrative (Fig. 3).
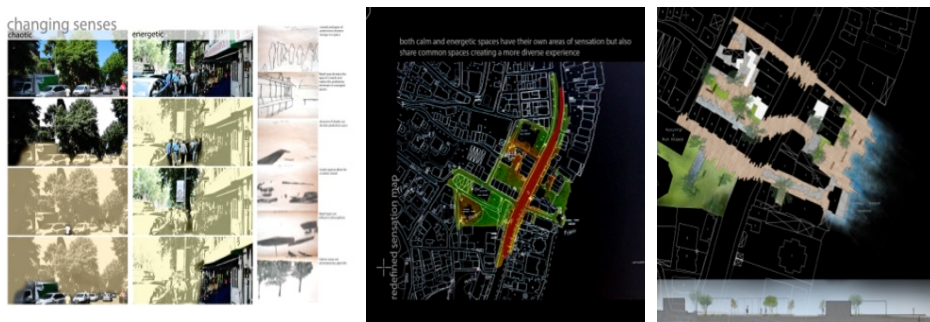

Fig. 3 Explorations and intervention on sensual atmospheres

Anothe.r student, turned her relaxed drift into a systematic exploration by recording her route every couple of steps through photographs. Later examining these photographs, she realized the elements attracted her attention and guided her drift were first blocked, then revealed and framed by some other elements on her way:

"As one walks through Yeniköy, he/she experiences different adventures of framed views. These views include multiple layers, which either limit or block certain elements. The design intention is to manipulate the individual movement in order to create certain frames".

Realizing how enjoyable was discovering these random elements through her walk, she looked into identifying historic, experiential, visual and programmatic destinations on site. She then attempted to stitch these moments through sequences of framed views by designing her own boundaries along the path (Fig. 4.).
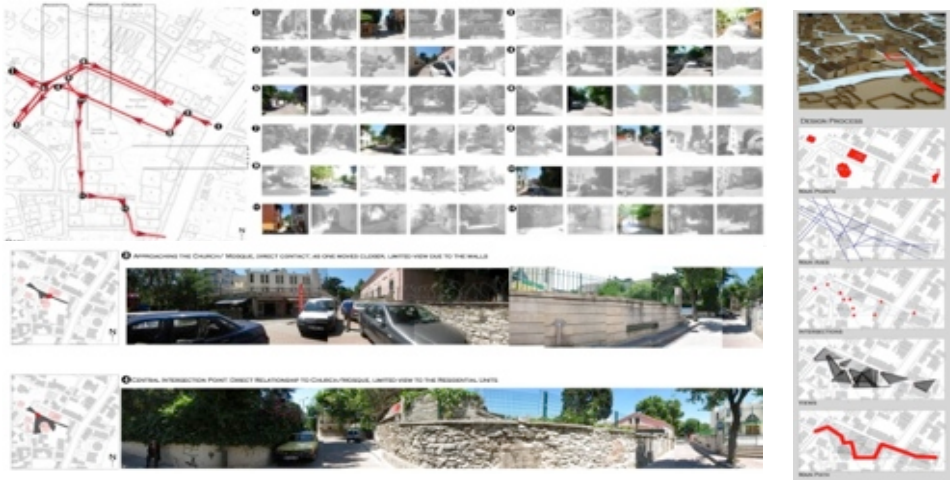

Fig. 4 Explorations and intervention proposal on framed views and visual fields

Perception and definition of space through visibility necessitated the use of isovist studies and photographic manipulation in her analysis. Analysis of figure-ground, circulation, vegetation, zoning and landscape also helped her designing elements of her experiential path. The student also studied existing topography and the vistas through "diagnostic" cross-sections. As a result, she designed a walk between the coast and the inner hills of the town via the central park by guiding the visual experience with framed views.

Fragmentation on site by typology and layered imprints of urban transformation resulted in
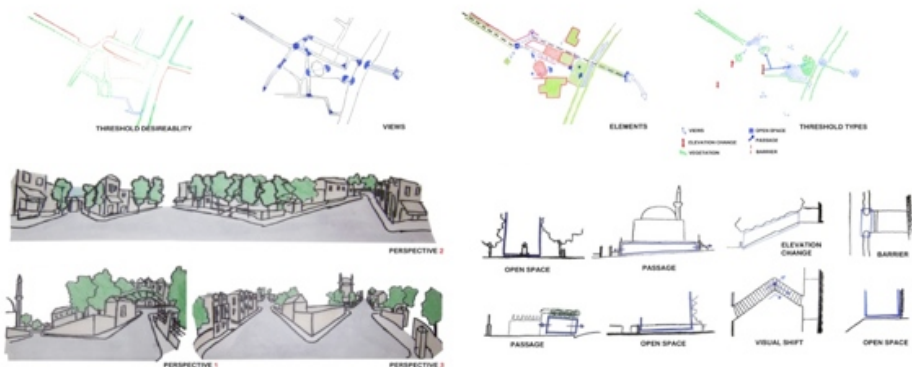

Fig.5 Explorations and intervention proposal on different types of thresholds and boundaries

another unique approach. Examining thresholds and boundaries, another student focused on identifying characteristics of boundaries and specific types of thresholds on the site.

His exploration contained diagrammatic analysis of specific moments from all around the site in section and plan. He then used these as a catalog to analyze a central park in the village and to resturucture an experience of a path crossing through the park. Finding some of the thresholds desirable and some undesirable, he used thresholds and barriers as a conceptual design formulation to connect larger and smaller areas of the site for a better flow and experience:

"Experiencing a space as a sequence of unique yet intertwined thresholds is the typology of this urban intervention... (which) seeks to reunite the urban fabric of the central village park. Using an analysis of existing thresholds as a platform from which to create a new design, the park uses 5 key threshold types: Elevation change+ visual shift+ passage + barrier + open space. These thresholds link the active waterfront and retail corridor through the central park containing the religious center of the village with the residential area in the hills beyond. The paths traverse through the park uses these five thresholds types to create a unique set of experiences among the park" (Fig. 5).

Similar to some other explorations on how urban spaces are defined on the site, another student focused specifically on boundaries. A student documented boundaries through a photo collection and categorized them as permeable, physical, visual and social. She was one of the three Turkish students who climbed up the hills and realized a social condition that one of the walls created in a residential area: A high wall seperated a high income-housing complex from a low income and a relatively historic residential block. What interested the student was how the wall helped to create an urban room for the low-income group as they extended their semi-private activities into the street and to the wall. The street was a public space, but she felt like intruding as people left their belongings in the street and gathered by the wall (Fig. 6).
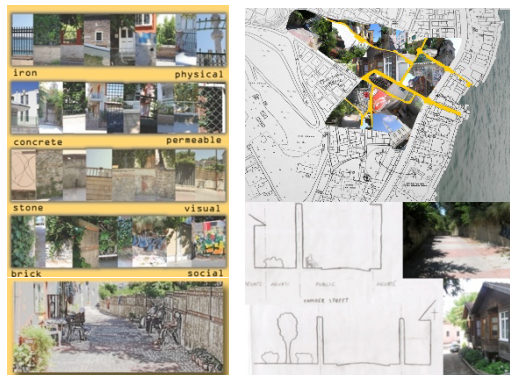

Fig. 6 Explorations on boundary types and vista points around the wall in the hills.

A group of two Turkish students traveled through the same area and was intrigued by the wall and vista. They thought that even though you could not see the sea from most of the streets, one carries a feeling and knowledge of being in a village by the strait. They also recorded that people could have seen the Bosporus and enjoyed the nice view up in that area if the high wall was not there. Influenced by all these, they thought the upper parts of the village had to be connected not only physically but also visually to the strait. They explored conditions of the streets by the high wall through cross sectional drawings. They also explored the continuum both perpendicular and parallel to the sea as well as fragmentation of streetscape by representing and manipulating the vertical boundaries throughout the site in a cross sectional model as well as working models of various scales (Fig. 6).

From this point on, ideas of the two students completed the first student's wall idea. Designing a low wall with a fluid form, she was able to accommodate various body postures and activities. In his manner, she increased the wall's programmatic role to support the activities of the residents in the "urban room". This wall also served the idea of visually connecting the hills to the sea and inviting public to experience the view. The same wall could accommodate access to the view, various postures of visitors to rest and bike parking. Consequently, a socially and visually separating boundary was transformed into a more socially engaging element while connecting various user groups and creating a visual continuum throughout the site (Fig. 7).
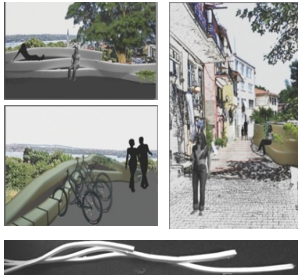
Fig. 7 Intervention proposal on manipulation of a wall

Christopher Alexander, in his book titled "A Foreshadowing of 21st Century Art" (1993) explains interwoven multi-centered structures by means of early Turkish Carpets and draws parallels between the structure of carpets and architecture. A student, also using carpet metaphor, depicted İstanbul by way of traditional patterns. She also explored materials common to all the villages and discovered that wrought iron was repeatedly used in various forms at each village. She was also impressed by classical Turkish music, some songs of which focused on Istanbul's historic cultural life. One form of this type of music is called "Taksim" and is a sole improvisation, (Özertim, 2003, p.11) which might be associated with the conception of space of "flãnerie"; Baudelaire's sense of poetic behavior. As the student walked through the site, she realized how structure of Taksim coincides with the site's physical division. Taksim, which means "dividing up into pieces", has three different parts; the introductory, transitional, and the final and Yeniköy has the division between the shore, the interface – the main road, and the main settlement. Weaving the culture, the architecture, the material, the musical structure, the hills and the cost together, the student created a path for an undivided experience through the village. She placed wrought iron nodal urban elements at the intersection of visual fields, so that one can follow those and see the intended special moments of the site (Fig. 8).

pathway to the sea

Fig. 8 Explorations and intervention proposal on weaving various moments in to one experience

Conclusion

In general, all the students concentrated on fragmentation of the city and the disconnect between the shore /sea and the main settlement. The methodology of the workshop allowed for each student to find their own way of identifying the main issue or a combination of issues, which resulted in diverse and unique exploration and representation techniques. It also allowed for the students to enjoy the site and the culture as much as possible. Consequently, all attempted to enhance the visual and physical experience on the site. Despite each presentation's uniqueness and individuality, each cultural group shared enough of common features to differentiate one from the other and to allow a comparison. Turkish students were more sensitive to the cultural and social division such as a wall separating a low-income and a high-income residential areas. Even though majority of the students studied definition and perception of urban spaces through visual fields, boundaries, borders, thresholds, etc., the Turkish students acknowledged the social and cultural aspects while the American students focused more on the bodily perception and way finding characteristics. In addition, the Turkish students chose to study areas further away from the cost in contrast to the focus areas of the American students. Students also paid attention to the materials and symbols of the separation between public and private as well as spatial interrelation of different type of religious buildings standing side by side.

Sketching, photography and analog modeling techniques were used nearly by all the students as observation and design tool as well as a way of thinking, There was no considerable difference between American and Turkish students in terms of variety of tools. However, the American students used sequential frame-by-frame representation techniques as a result of recording and exploring the environment as one experiences. While Turkish students in the workshop developed their ideas mostly via discussing with instructors, American students developed their ideas, in large part, independently through the use of alternative graphic language and formal analysis.

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