

Editorial

Collective memories, vernacular architecture and transforming historic urban identities of Turkey and beyond.

Tasleem Shakur
Lancashire, UK



Conserving the ‘idea’ (the image of memory) of what a built environment should be and what it should represent-as the environment pertains to the memory- seems to be one of the important dynamics of contemporary design. Perhaps this becomes more of a fundamental pre-requisite when the focus is on historic built environments and in more specifically when relating to the regeneration of historic urban identities. For example, some research in the Mediterranean region suggest that their traditional towns provide unique ‘sense of place’ to those who voluntarily, or involuntarily, left those sites and now live elsewhere (Shakur, T, 2015). Also, experience of heritage architecture, planning and urban design from both developed and developing world in the 21st century suggest that development plans, have produced visibly vibrant communities. In some cases, while there do exist serious contestations of land uses, however, the end product still appear to have favoured the communities living or working in those spaces (ibid.). Researching on Mediterranean urban and building codes, investigating the origins, content and lessons; Hakim highlights the ‘richness’ and ‘sense of place’ of traditional towns with reference to modern built environments as:



‘We have seen from the material in this study how traditional towns located around Mediterranean and beyond display individual uniqueness in their built form qualities and overall physical attributes, including strong sense of place. We also know from observation and research that residents develop strong sense of place in and around their neighbourhoods later on in life when they are living elsewhere in ‘modern contemporary built environment settings’ (Hakim, B S 2008:38-39).

Comparison between historical traditional community settlements with its corresponding modern/postmodern settlements does not seem to be a popular research trend, and it is even harder to identify serious studies analysing aspects of architecture and urbanism with Muslim major countries of the world (Shakur, T: 2008:211). However, a few regional or cultural focused research and observation at different time provide some insightful concepts. For example, a post-doctoral work on Istanbul (Yamacli, R:1999) suggests that the flexible design

aspects of Ottoman empire make it so adaptable to a number of subsequent cultures to expand upon. My own observation of more than a quarter of a century to Granada, Istanbul, Bursa, Marakech, Samarkhand, Jeddah, Dhaka, Delhi and Lahore where many of the historically designed quarters (Madina, Mohalla, Bazaar and Sukhs) are bustling with renewed energy, perhaps reminiscent of their enriched past (ibid). Researching on *'Culture, architecture and growth'* and focusing on the Fulbe nomadic experience in Nigeria, Daramola blames western influences when this architect/academic suggests:

'Cultural identity in architecture is a major concern to the contemporary world of architecture, indigenous architecture have been grossly abused by foreign influences and this has brought series of acculturation that alienate the original cultural values' (Darmola, A: 2007:103).

Bursa, the 14th century first Ottoman capital of Turkey, is one the old historic cities where the traditional cultures and settlements have survived despite embracing the development principles of modernist and globalisation periods (Shakur, T op cit. 2015). Being located at the far end of *'silk and spice route'* it became one of the most important commercial and production centres of the world between 1450 and 1600 (Shakur,T; Hafiz,A; Arslan T V and Cahantimur A: 2012:5).



Inside and outside of 15th Century Ottoman silk market *Koza Han* (near the Grand Mosque), shopping and leisure/recreational activities in Bursa (Turkey). *Source: author 2014*

More than a quarter of a century ago I had the privilege of being a guest editor of a special issue of the unique architecture journal, *Mimar* on *'Construction technologies in context'* (Mimar:1991) which included a number of ground breaking articles on the allied subjects including a fascinating commentary by the world renowned author, academic Paul Oliver who dedicated half a century on researching in culture and vernacular architecture. In *'Transmitting Technologies'* (Oliver, P: 1991:56-57) Oliver demanded a closer look into traditional methods for a truer manifestation of the future of vernacular architecture (Shakur, T: 1991:7). But then he was also sceptical about the transfer of technology, particularly in terms of building methods and materials as such aspects of vernacular technology may not have perceived by the professional (architects, engineers) in the same way as the traditional builders of the 1990s decade (ibid). I am not sure if there had been any attitudinal change in the present millennium but Oliver proposed a hard look (no matter how slow the process is), at how to learn and achieve

a similar level of skill and quality of workmanship (ibid). While reviewing the articles and writing the editorial on traditional architecture and construction methods I felt the revival of traditional indigenous materials and technologies in the early 1990s which was perhaps inspired by the legendary Egyptian architect/educator Hasan Fathy (Shakur, T; op cit. 6).

During 2014 GBER was actively involved with the Architecture department of Uludag University and the Chamber of Architecture, Bursa section (Turkey) in the preparation of the conference theme of the mega 26th International Building and Life fair and Congress. While the final theme of the congress was on the 'Reinvention of the City Centre', GBER's original idea (along with the academics of Uludag University's Architecture department) was on the '*Historic Built Environments and its adaptability today: Transformation of the cultural city centres*'. GBER's original two day international workshop aim was intended to bring built environment professionals and scholars to analyse and share their understanding of diverse transformation and re-creation of international historic sites. It also sought to provide special emphasis on historical design analysis of the '*Cultural City Centres*' and '*its applicability (use or re-use) for today and the future*'. However, in the final run the conference theme was on '*Re-invention of the city center*' (see cover page of the massive book of abstract above with the title of this editorial). With a staggering number of 58 presentations and 102 Turkish national and international participants, the three-day event between 3-5 April was indeed a great success. Much of the credits for this unique collaboration should go to Professor Tulin Arslan along with Professor Arzu Kahantimur, Dr Sibel Polat and Professor Neslihan Dostoglu of Uludag University's architecture department. While the Chamber of Architects did publish massive proceedings (over five hundred pages along with a micro disc), GBER (as agreed before) did opt for a special volume based on its original workshop ideas the emerging themes of the conference. Coincidentally the papers, which were finally accepted after peer review, did more or less match with the journal's original title. It is within such background context this unique special issue is being compiled.

Alpay, Gokgur and Altay's article on 'The conservation and Urban Identity and memory in spatial planning of Yassiada' (near Istanbul) examines the role of urban identity and memory in spatial planning through the current planning approaches in the island. Through a straight forward research methodology of data collection, photographic interpretation and in somewhat participant observation, the authors strongly argue that the contemporary spatial plans with apparently no related strategies and policies in relation to the island's rich historical identity, memory and collective values would not be protected.

Continuing with the emerging urban planning matters; Kaya, Kaya and Serder research into 'Integration of groves into urban fabric' focuses into relatively new concept of Green Infrastructure in one of the major Mega cities of the world, Istanbul. Here the authors observe the substantial loss of green areas leading to the decline of 'ecological sustainability' at the periphery of the city due to the continuous sprawl and densification of urban areas. Like the previous article's concern for conservation of historical identity, here the authors develops a unique framework of analysis based on the concept that the '*historic groves have high potential to sustain the historic landscape character and support the urban green network*'. The

researchers argue through a systematic review of literature that in order to achieve such goal the endangered areas need to be re-evaluated as a component of green infrastructure with their functions. As an applied research, this article zooms into a district level pilot planning approach by providing a Green Infrastructure system considering groves as important hubs and existing green spaces as stepping-stones for development.

This issue being mainly based on the historic built environments of Turkey, some authors quite legitimately anchored their research on transformative identity and collective memory. Like the opening article on Yassiada (Alpay et al op cit), Polat and Dostoglu's article (*Semantic transformation of public open space: Bursa Republican Square*) focus on the notion of collective memory and its predicate, collective and individuated identity. With a rigorous literature review exploring the diverse concepts of *'Identity and meaning of public open spaces'*; this article provides some thought provoking findings on the fascinating changes of identity and meaning of the Ottoman empire's public square in Bursa through an analysis of four historical periods starting from the mid nineteenth century to 2010. The study findings are well substantiated through the methodological tools of archival research and deep interviews. One of the important findings of the nineteenth twentieth century period include how the Square was used as a powerful representation of Ottoman empire where the facades of the adjacent buildings reflected Western style while the interior space keeping up with the traditional norms. Interestingly, in the modern period of mid twentieth century the Square seems to have embraced the city's citizen spatial behaviours which included protest movements, walking, shopping, eating and organising festivities. In a more recent time of the twenty first century the users have moved to more young people and students and the Square no longer represent the same symbol as it did in the past.

With a broad-brush macro socio-economic context of Turkey, and in particular describing Istanbul's urban and social fabric's transformation from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Tunali Selma examines *'the effect of socio-cultural changes on urban areas'* through a case study of Kadikoy historical bazar (which is located in one of Istanbul's oldest settlements). Like other megacities of the developing world Selma narrates similar phenomenon of *accelerated rural-urban migration and diversified consumptive behaviour* which the author reckons have impacted on the urban social fabric and identity of today's Turkey's cities. While focusing on the old traditional bazaar of Kadikoy district, Selma argues that it is this macro socio-economic changes which has caused a rapid change in the cultural life of traditional bazaars like Kadikoy. Here we see what the bazaars identity was intrinsically integrated with residential quarters (somewhat like mohallas) are apparently fast diminishing presumably with the advent of business and transportation investments. Finally, the study provides some concrete guidelines and recommendations including restrictions on conversions of old buildings, changes in ownership of properties, sales locations and health safety measures for manufacturing and textile productions.

The final two articles from Turkey are combination of current cognitive international thoughts of contemporary architecture, planning, urban design by young academics and the related studio based classroom designs on historic sites of Turkish cities. In a way, they reflect the

creative mind of young architect/academics and future designers of the way they are going to tackle the current built environment through futuristic solutions. Ersan Koc's article on '*Town Planning and Design prospects from Turkey*' was not a part of the 2014 Conference but was submitted to GBER regular issue but we referees thought it may be more appropriate to be included with the '*Special Issue*' as the theme was much relevance to other papers and in particular forms a pedagogic group with Kacar et al article discussed below.

Kacar et al draw on Rossi's notion of an 'urban singularity how each section (or part) of the city may be understood as a singularity through their article '*The riverfront as a natural artefact in urban public life: A case study of Eskesehir Porsuk*'. Here the authors aim at integrating a physical part into an urban whole: anchoring urban development around the functionality and the singularity of the Porsuk river. The conceptual aspects which the paper hinges upon include 'collective memory' (*that cities are the collective memory affects the transformation of the urban space*), Moneo's *urban form shapes the city* and Lynch's *unveiling city's covert structure and identity*. All these concepts are explored and debated as a contextual framework of an assessment analysing Eskesehir's natural structure, identity and the city's collective memory. In the final part three student groups illustrative urban design exercises were separately summarised where each group attempt to analyse display Eskesehir's important natural landscape with specific design guidelines and criteria of paths, edges, districts and nodes.

Koc's article speculated on two student workshops the author conducted with students in the two departments of architecture in Iznik and Kandira in the historical Turkish provinces of Bursa and Kocaeli. The evaluation of conducted workshops aims at producing 'socio-spatial' transformational project templates, programmes for urban design through evaluating the planning and design process prepared by the students. Koc indicates how an interdisciplinary framework is required for transformational design projects. While the workshop exercises were exploring more of philosophical aspects of urban planning and design prospects (focusing on the investigating concerns of 'public spaces', 'common spaces' and 'collective and shared' values); the framework of analysis seems to be well grounded on what Koc describes '*the multi-layered value components and urban identity prospects*' of present day Turkey. Like Tunali Selma's article (described earlier), here the author too emphasizes the country's concern with the unique post 1980s development of '*the urban orientation* which apparently has sealed the *fate, form and shape of Turkey's production, consumption, culture and environmental spaces for the last 30 years*'. The emphasis on shared or collective values, predicted on the notion of collected memory resonates with other articles in this volume. While it does not develop the notion of collective memory in a sustained fashion (see Kacar et al, Alpay et al and Polat and Dostulgu in this volume), as its primary focus is a discussion and justification for architects to hold workshops that include a multiplicity of elements, from citizens to agencies and institutions. This article should be read in relation to other articles in the volume, with its methodological propositions in relation to the planning and design process, the attempt to synthesise disparate aims, notions and orientations.

Some two and half decade back Paul Oliver concluded that there was a desperate need for technological guidance in relation to modern materials and there was also a need for recognition and reappraisal of traditional technologies (Shakur,T, op cit:6). Hasan Fathy's late 1940s design and construction of *New Gourna Vilage* in Luxor, based on the principle of vernacular architecture, local material technique (what we now a days call sustainable architecture), inspired my generation of architects in the late 1970s design studios, and I now wonder, similar revivals in *'transformative pedagogy in transformative pedagogy of architecture and urbanism* are taking place in the design studios of Turkey and beyond (Salama, A M:2009).

Eamon Reid is one of your talented postgraduate students, who while studying human geography did some good study/research on my modules on 'Sustainability and the Global Built Environment' and 'Amsterdam field trip' (particularly specialising in ethnic minority immigrant communities housing and urban developmental issues). For the last one year he volunteered to help GBER (like other long standing volunteer staff and ex-students like Dr Quazi, Kevin Burke, Dr Jamie Halsall and Natalie Tebbett) and was instrumental in editing most of the Turkish papers (following peer review) for this issue. While doing so he got really involved with the emerging issues and started researching on the concept of *'Transitioning Cities'* (with its pegging points from my twelve years old GBER publication based edited volume on *'Cities in Transition: Transforming the global built environment: 2005*) and quite innovatively attempted to link with the key variables researched by the contributors of this special issue. It is therefore comes as no surprise that Reid has provided us with a befitting commentary on *'Transitioning cities and beyond'*. In a way, this robustly researched and rigorously substantiated work acts as an ideal conclusion to this special issue. Some readers may find this contribution somewhat philosophical and polemic but it is well grounded on the concepts of *'collected memories and urban identities'*, *vernacular built environment, contested spaces and transitional cities'*. In three clearly developed sections Reid articulates his arguments referencing through the examples of many of the articles on Turkey and more importantly taking it beyond to other related both developed and developing cities case studies. However, what I find stimulating about this commentary is about the political linkages and somewhat challenging questions Reid subtly raises through his re-interpretation of *collective memory, the role of the vernacular* and the *contestation of the spaces* (as raised through this issue and other related authors like me in other publications, beyond Turkish cities). In a way it is a humble attempt to provoke challenging thoughts on the unanswered questions that we raised with a bunch of architect planners more than a decade ago and those left open by the authors of this issues in understanding the problem cities. At the end Reid raises tough political questions regarding design process and the implementations of conceived plans by the architects and planners including that of the construction.

Some seven years ago, researching in two historic south Asian cities (Dhaka and Lahore), a few architects, planners and academics found the contradiction among the old and new, complexity between the space uses and the incongruity between architectural language and therefore raised questions regarding the appropriateness of the historic architecture in the

present millennium (Shakur, T; Islam, I and Masood J: 2010:7). Looks like similar parallel could be made in Turkish historical architectural scene and beyond.

At the end, I would like to apologise for the long three years this issue has taken in formulating this special issue. Unfortunately, my wife Yasmin (also a onetime architect and was involved in cardiac hospital unit, an extension of Louis I Kahn's National Assembly complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh) has sadly passed away a year ago this time and I could not concentrate for the last two years following her deteriorating health. In the past, she did travel to different cities of Turkey with me and loved the country's rich historic built environments and I would therefore like to dedicate this issue to her memories.

References:

Daramola , A (2015)

Culture, architecture and growth: The Fulbe Nomadic experience in Nigeria'. Published in Rahman M (ed), Society, Architects and Emerging Issues: Conference Book. Published by Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) and Institute of Architects (IAB), Dhaka, Bangladesh

Hakim, B S (2008)

'Mediterranean urban and building codes: origin, content, impact and lesson' published in Urban Design International, 13, 21-40

Oliver, P (1991)

'Transmitting Technologies' in Shakur, T Guest edited special issue on *'Construction Technologies'*, Mimar 38 : Architecture in Development, March 1991

Salama, A M (2009)

'Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism', Published by UMBAU-VERLAG

Shakur, T ed (1991)

'Construction technologies in context', Guest Editorial article for Mimar 38: Architecture in Development, March 1991

Shakur,T (2008)

'Historic/Cultural Islamic Architecture and its applicability in the contemporary world'. Published in Kamal A (compiled) Abstracts and papers on International Conference on Islamic Art and Architecture, 13-16 November, 2008 at Lahore (Pakistan), published by National College of Arts (NCA).

Shakur, T; Islam, I and Masood, J (2010)

'What culture, whose space and which technology? The contested transformation and the changing historic built environment of south Asia'. Published in IJAR, International Journal of Architectural Research, Volume 4, Issue 1. March 2010

Shakur, T; Hafiz R; Tulin V A and Cahantimur, A (2012)

'Economy and culture in transitions: A comparative study of two architectural heritage sites of Bazaars and Huns of Bursa and Dhaka'. Published in IJAR, International Journal of Architectural Research, Volume 6, Issue 3. November 2012

Shakur, T (2015)

'From historic built environments to the cultural heritage sites of some satisfied communities in the South: Lessons for the professionals, policy makers and the educationists' published in a refereed book of Research papers for a Conference organised by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia 2015

Yamacli, R (1999)

'Istanbul: The historic peninsula in cross cultural design place for space'. Published by, International Centre for Development and Environmental Studies (ICDES), DES 10, Edge Hill University

Tasleem Shakur