



Rethinking the Meaning of Transformed Historic Environment Through the Non-Muslim Religious Structures of Izmir

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Abstract

Izmir city, which is the focus of the study, has hosted many different historical periods and their cultural outputs from past to present. In the city, the traces of different cultural periods such as civilizations of antiquity, Beyliks, Ottomans and Turkish Republic can be examined at the same time. Due to the developments in the marine trade in 19th century, the physical, economical and social structure of the port city Izmir was improved. The enriched structure of Izmir can still be observed through its historical environment. Within this heritage, the role of religious buildings in terms of urban identity, environmental impact and social belonging have a great importance. Furthermore, the preservation / transformation implementations of these structures reshape the physical and social structure of the city.

In this sense, the subject of this study is to examine the environmental and social impact of the transformed non-Muslim religious structures of Izmir. Through the site analyses, the effect of the preservation implementations and the new urban roles of these monumental buildings are to be defined while the continuity of the cultural values and contributions to the urban identity will be questioned. The findings of the research will be evaluated over a set of parameters such as environmental impact, sense of belonging, continuity of the spatial identity and the sufficiency of the new uses.

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Keywords

Religious Structures; Non-Muslim; Historical Preservation; Re-Use; Izmir

1. Izmir and the Greek Society

Izmir city, which is situated on the Aegean Sea in Western Anatolia, has hosted many different cultures from ancient times until today. The oldest settlement of the city: Smyrna was founded in 1102 BC in the northeast of Izmir Bay (Güner, 2005). Smyrna, known as the city where Homer was born, was one of the brightest Greek cities in Anatolia (Mansel, 2011). After this settlement was invaded many times, it was destroyed and dispersed. After than, it was rebuilt on the slopes of Mountain Pagos by Alexander the Great in 344 BC. The second Smyrna was known as the beautiful city of Asia in the Hellenistic period with its walls, temples and Gymnasium (Beyru, 2000).

While the city was dominated by the Roman Empire in 133 BC, it was the largest Roman city in Asia as well. In 53-56 AD, the city was visited by St. Paul, and one of the oldest Christian churches was established. In 395 AD, as a result of the division of the Great Roman Empire into two, the city was dominated by the Byzantine Empire. As the city, was attacked by the Seljuks in 1082, by the Genoese in 1261, by the Sen Jan Knights in 1344, by Timurlenk in 1402 and by the Venetians in 1472, it had administrative changes till it was came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire in 1425 (Mansel, 2011).

As the city was developing under the rule of Ottomans, the social structure was formed by, Muslim, Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities. In 16th century İzmir was strengthened in commercial activities and became one of the major settlements of Western merchants. The city became an important port within the Mediterranean trade routes in the 19th century (Güner, 2005). Due to the growing trade capacity, the population of the city increased and the social structure of the city formed by Muslim Turks, Orthodox Greeks, Armenians and Jews was enriched by Protestant and Catholic Levantines. In the 19th century, the physical appearance of the city has also changed (Bırol Akkurt, 2017). The social groups have settled in different neighbourhoods depending on their major activities and their interrelations. As most of the Muslims engaged in craftsmanship and trade, they lived in the neighbourhoods on the slopes of Kadifekale, the Jews who acted as intermediaries in the trade lived between the Muslim neighborhoods and the traditional trade center (Kemeraltı). Armenians, who played an important role in long-distance trade, lived between the two branches of the caravan road near the commercial center. The coastal urban structure formed by the Western groups who holded the maritime trade, was note worthy. The Greeks lived on the northeast of the neighbourhoods of Westerns (Smyrnelis, 2016) (Fig. 1). Today, some of the mosques, churches and the synagogues of Ottoman period still exists as symbols of the multicultural social structure of the city.

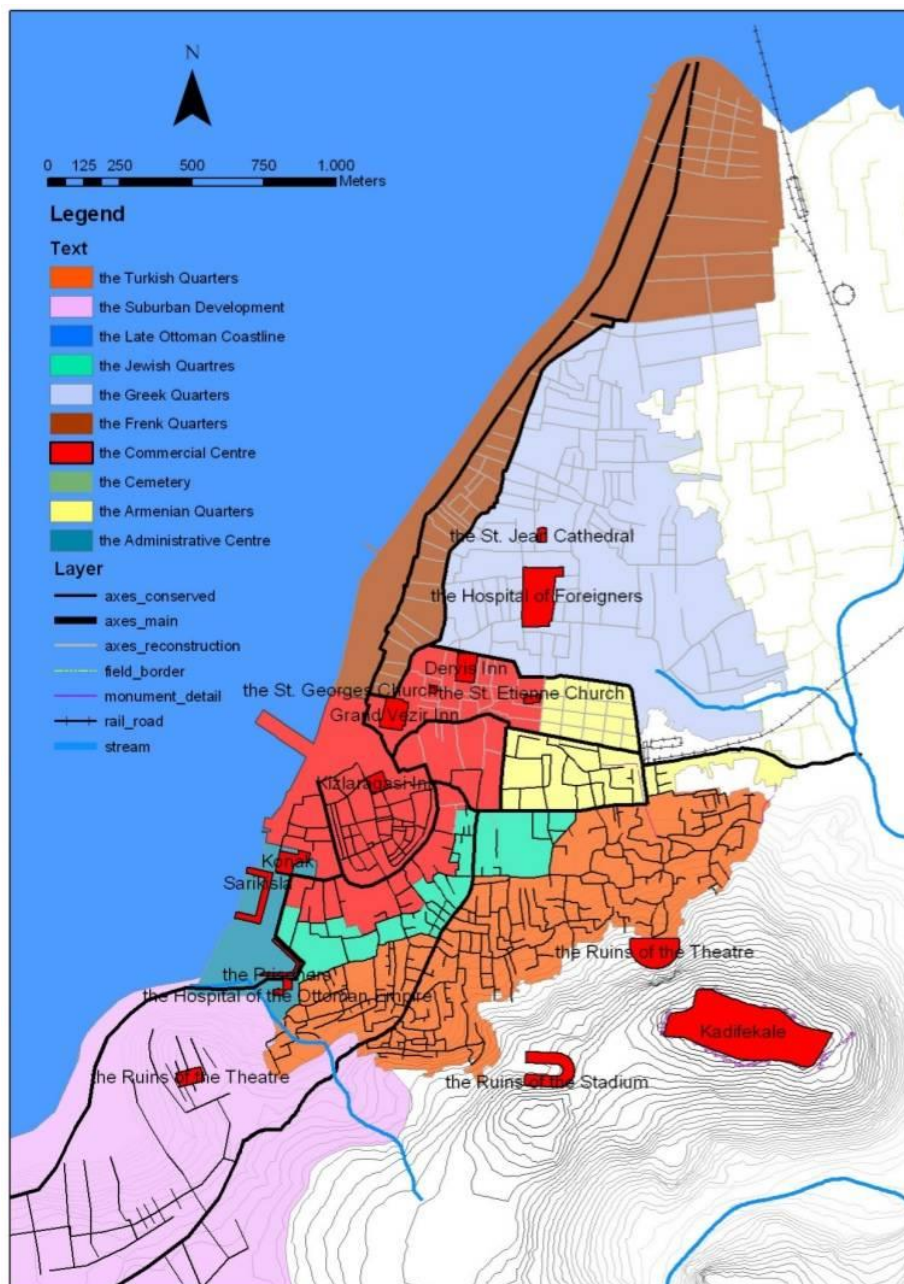


Figure 1. Living quarters of social groups in 19th century (Belge, 2005)

The Greek community was an important part of the social structure of Ottoman Empire. The Greek population increased in the early 19th century, despite of the separation of the Greece from the Ottoman Empire as a result of the declaration of Greek independence. (Biol Akkurt, 2017). The economic and administrative uncertainty experienced in Greece, along with the commercial and social power of İzmir, were important factors that led to many Greeks choosing to live in İzmir (Mansel, 2011).

The 19th century was a period during which İzmir underwent substantial structural changes. During this period, many important buildings (religious / educational / commercial) were constructed in the city. In the second half of the 19th century, many churches were built in Greek neighborhoods (Fig 2). In this period, the city's highest structure was the bell tower of the St. Photina Greek Orthodox Church, which was built in 1856 (Mansel, 2011).



Figure 2. 1922 İzmir Map (Source: <http://www.levantineheritage.com/data10.htm>)

World War I and the Greek occupation in 1919 were periods when İzmir's economic output, multicultural structure and relations with Europe were significantly damaged (Smyrnelis, 2016). One of the most important factors contributing to this was the demographic change of İzmir. The city was reclaimed by Turkish army in 1922 after an occupation that lasted for 3 years and Population Exchange occurred in 1923 after the War of Independence. Due to the inter-governmental agreement between Turkey and Greece, the migration of Turks from Greece to Anatolia and

Greeks from Anatolia to Greece was mandatory, and consequently changed the social structure of both countries. The most important event that changed the spatial traces of İzmir's multicultural society was the Great Fire that took place on 13 September 1922. This fire, which destroyed most of the Armenian and Greek neighborhoods, has greatly damaged the physical, cultural and social structure of the city (Güner, 2005).

Due to the effects of war, the population exchange and the fire in İzmir at the beginning of the 20th century, many buildings belonging to the Greeks in the city lost their landlords and remained vacant and unmaintained for many years. Many churches located in the fire area were demolished by the cleaning work carried out in the urban tissue. In the first years of the Republic, most of the Greek churches were demolished and mosques or public buildings were built in their place, due to the loss of community and custodians to maintain the properties.

The Orthodox Churches remain standing in central Izmir are St. Voukolos Church and Doğanlar Chapel. In the districts of Izmir, Çeşme; St. Haralambos Church, Alaçatı Central Church, Dalyan Anonymous Central Church, Ildırı Erythrai Church, Chapel in Ildırı, Şirince; Hagios Demetrios Church, St. Ioannes Prodromos Church, Mabed Church, Foça; The chapel in Sazlıca, the Church of Hagios Georgios, the Church in Maşatlık, the chapel in Kartdere, Menemen; The church of Hagios Konstantinos, the Tepe Church and the Güzelbahçe Church in Urla are the Orthodox churches that exist today.

Today, some of the Greek Orthodox churches in Izmir are ruined, some have been restored to maintain the original function as a religious structure, and some are used for different functions. The purpose of the study is to reveal the effects of conservation practices through the examples of St. Voukolos Church and St. Haralambos Church, and to examine the continuity of cultural values of the aforementioned structures and their contribution to İzmir's urban identity.

2. Church of St. Voukolos

The church of St. Voukolos was built between 1866 and 1867, funded by financial contributions from the Greek Orthodox community (Akkurt, 2015). The church was named after the first psychopos of Izmir, St. Voukolos. The church is located on the administrative border of the Muslim quarter, but it has served the Greek-Orthodox community settled around this area. On the 1922 map, the neighborhood in which St. Voukolos Church was located named as St. Vouklas. The Vouklas area was surrounded by Armenian and Jewish neighborhoods in the west, Muslim Turkish neighborhoods in the south, and Greek neighborhoods such as Aya Katerina, Aya Dimitri and Aya Nikola in the north. (Figure 1).

The church of St. Voukolos maintained its physical presence after the Izmir fire that occurred in 1922, but lost its usage value due to the fact that it remained uninhabited after the consequences of the fire and population exchange program (Akkurt, 2015). After the Big Fire, due to the disappearance of many buildings suitable for use as a museum, Saint Voukolos Church was repaired and opened in 1927 as Museum of Antiquities. In that period the building was started to receive more historical artifacts than its capacity, and over time it became a building used as cultural warehouse (Serçe, 2002). In 1984, the Museum of Modern Archeology was opened and the historical artifacts kept in the church were moved here. St. Vouklos Church was registered as an Immovable Cultural Property to be Protected in 1975. In 1984, the Ministry of Culture assigned the property to the Directorate General of Izmir Opera and Ballet as an opera study hall. However, a fire that occurred in this period put the structure out of use again. While the church structure served the city with different functions in the previous periods, the environment in which it was situated underwent a physical and social change. After the population exchange, some of the houses which fell vacant were inhabited by Turks. Some properties were already vacant. In the following years, due to factors such as internal migration, differentiated socio-economic environment, renewed area usage decisions and the physical aging of houses, it has become a region with low economic power immigrants (Akkurt, 2015).

St. Voukolos Church, which had been derelict for a long time after the fire, was restored between 2008-2010 to be used as a cultural center, and the building still continues to fulfill this function. With the restoration application of the church, the unqualified attachments disrupting the architectural character of the church were cleaned, and the original features of the structure that reflected the cultural essence of the period were restored. The importance of preserving the original details before the church was destroyed and cannot be denied in terms of the continuity of cultural values.



Figure 3. St. Voukolos Church before the restoration; (a)west facade, (b)north facade
(Source: Umart Architecture, 2008)



Figure 4. St. Voukolos Church after the restoration (Severoğlu, 2018)



Figure 5. Interior view of the church after the restoration (Severoğlu, 2018)

The historical structure and physical environment are elements that significantly affect each other. We can describe the Church of Saint Voukolos as an urban reminder that allows society to correlate between past and present. However, many negative factors in the physical environment of the Church prevent the church from being viewed or visited by people living in the city. One of the negative factors is the number of tall structures located on the main artery road in the vicinity of the Church which obscure church's presence. Another factor is that the area is neglected, and therefore has an insecure environment. The neglected areas seen around the church are mostly due to the low level of education of the users and lack of economic opportunities. After the restoration work carried out in the Church of St. Voukolos, the neglect of the surrounding area was partially reduced, but it was not sufficient to eliminate the insecure environment. In order for the area to be integrated with the city and to be recognized by the community, it is important to increase the quality of life in the area and to completely remove the insecure environment by repairing neglected buildings.

St. Voukolos Church, which is the physical and cultural focus of the area, has not been sufficiently adopted by the people living in the city and local users, despite the fact that its cultural values and change of function were intended to ensure continuity of use. Due to the low level of education of the users in the area, activities such as concerts and exhibitions organized in the structure do not attract the attention of local users. Some activities, such as education and assistance, did motivate the locals to visit the Church. In order for the users of the area to connect with the historical building, activities should account for the socio-cultural structure of the surrounding area.

3. Church of St. Haralambos

Saint Haralambos Church was built in 1832 in Çeşme, İzmir (Gezgin, 2013). The church is named after the Saint Haralambos, who bears the title of 'sacred martyr' and served as the priest of Christians in Manisa during the years 193-210 (Gezgin, 2009). In the 19th century, Çeşme was the only settlement in Izmir with a thriving seafaring industry. In this period, major import and export activities were carried out in Çeşme port and the port was the most effective source of income in the city. In the 19th century, the city, which increased its economic level through trade and tourism, received many immigrants from the islands (Kayın, 1988). In this period, there were about 75 churches in the district of which St. Haralambos Church was one of the largest and most important Orthodox churches in the region (Urgun, 2016).

After the Greeks left the city in 1923, St. Haralambos church was abandoned for a long time (Urgun, 2016). Until the restoration in 1988 carried out by Çeşme Municipality, many unqualified additions have been made to the structure with the purpose of renovating the building for commercial and storage activities. Restoration work carried out by the Municipality of Çeşme removed the unqualified appendages of the building, and the property started to be used as a cultural center. The cultural center suffered various instances of damage due to a lack of maintenance over time. For this reason, in the period of 2010-2012, repair work was performed and the building continued to be used as a cultural center. The structure continues to function as a cultural center to this day.

St. Haralambos Church is a registered building located in the Castle of Çeşme Conservation Area, established in 1985 by the Conservation Board for Cultural and Natural Assets of Izmir No. 1. It is important to note that as a result of the restoration work carried out at the St. Haralambos Church, the original spatial fiction, architectural elements, ornamentation and frescoes of the structure have been unearthed.



Figure 6. St. Haralambos Church in 1987; (a) east facade, (b) interior view (Source: Conservation Board of Izmir)



Figure 7. St. Haralambos Church after the restoration; (a) east facade, (b) interior view (Severoğlu, 2019)

St. Haralambos Church is located on İnkılap street, which is the main trade axis of Çeşme. Trade units on this axis are mostly oriented towards tourism. For this reason, the church is known by the people in the city and is easily recognized by tourists. Due to the fact that the location of the building is integrated with the city, society has witnessed the transformation of the church from the past to the present, and has been involved as users in different functions of building. This situation led to the increase in the interest and curiosity about church, and provided a sense of belonging of the users. The users of the area support the Haralambos Church in its function as a cultural center due to the lack of cultural facilities elsewhere in the city. Because the structure is closed to visitors in times other than activity days, tourists coming to the city are often unable to perceive the structure adequately.

Investigations into the urban comfort conditions around the St. Haralambos Church show that there are problems such as insufficient infrastructure, neglected buildings and a lack of recreation areas. In the summer months, the number of visitors in the district increases and traffic problems begin to develop. When the situation of the area before and after the church restoration is examined, it has been noticed that the maintenance work carried out in the church had no significant impact on the physical environment, and the important structures with historical values in the vicinity of the structure are still neglected.

4. Conclusion

Considering the success of the transformation of historical buildings, the continuity of the spatial and usage value is not enough. The social and environmental consequences of the new uses of transformed historical structures are as important as the continuity of the architectural features. For this reason, in order to maintain the continuity of the

structure, it is necessary to integrate it with the physical environment and to ensure that the new use is compatible with the social dynamics of the urban environment.

In the examples of Saint Haralambos and Saint Voukolos Church examined within the scope of the study, it is seen that the position of the structure in the city, its physical and social environment and usage status have a great impact on the perception of the inhabitants. It is important that new urban roles of re-functionalized structures connect the inhabitants with the structure. The churches of St. Haralambos and St. Voukolos were visited by Bartholomew I, the ecumenical patriarch of the Istanbul Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in 2010-2016. This indicates that these structures are still valuable in the Orthodox world. Historical buildings such as St. Haralambos and St. Voukolos Church enable us to better understand the multicultural structure of the past and to connect the past and the future. So that it is important to maintain the urban / social meaning of them as much as its physical existence.

Although religious buildings with historical value have lost their function of worship, they continue to maintain their environmental and social effects with the cultural values they carry from past to present. For this reason, the physical and social environment of the building should be analyzed in detail before the restoration implements. Re-using by taking into account the environmental factors, will enable the structure to integrate with the physical and social environment and maintain its role as an urban reminder.

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