

Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of The Third Big City of Alsancak-İzmir, Turkey

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Abstract

The city of İzmir is in the center of Western Anatolia with a rich historical background, and has continued existence as a big city for a history of 5000 years. However, attacks during this historical term, the settlement of Ottoman term cities on the ancient city, internal and external attacks, natural disasters such as fires and earthquakes, increase of shanties after 1950, reconstructions on historical environments in the name of modernization caused the historic buildings to disappear largely. It is necessary to show all kinds of efforts in order to transfer to the future such buildings present but failing to preserve their historical values in İzmir.

Historical remains have mostly disappeared in İzmir; historical residences have a special place in İzmir as the elements constituting the identity of city with their significance with regards to quality and quantity. Levantine residences in Alsancak, İzmir are the first historical residences declared to be included in the site area for protection. However, the region has been apart from being a site area; only two streets were selected and put under protection but unfortunately it could not be successful. This study aims to provide solution suggestions by observing and determining which measures should be taken for the streets and façades of buildings in order to protect and preserve the historical Greek Houses in Alsancak, İzmir.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Conservation, Levantine houses, Suggestions Alsancak
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Introduction

Being at a central location in Western Anatolia the cradle of civilization, İzmir has continued existence as a big city throughout its history of 5000 years also with the effect of its geopolitical structure. İzmir has hosted many civilizations and nationalities since ancient times. As Westerns travelers of 19th century mentioned frequently, İzmir resembled a federal republic due to the ethnic distribution of population and due to each group being organized separately. Throughout the years, İzmir sheltered communities from such different cultures and nations; therefore, those various ways of life reflected themselves on the places where they lived, especially on the residences, and brought them in various identities. The traditional residence architecture in İzmir has been constituted of houses influenced by Traditional Turkish houses, Levantine and Greek houses mutually. On the other hand, İzmir was destroyed mostly after the fire on the 13th of September, 1922, and the districts and constructions with historical values were vanished.

The secondary and effective factor causing the historical nature of İzmir to ruin was the rise of shanties and unsound urbanization. The migrations started after the 1960s and the city was developed

rapidly but without plan, and there have been great reconstructions in historical environments. It is observed that the number of historically valued residences in the city decreases day by day and they are not protected.

The importance of protecting the Cultural Heritage can not be limited only to transferring our past values to future generations. Utilizing the cultural accumulation of the past as a significant source in creating the future gains importance in facilitating and improving the future lives of communities. In addition, preserving the cultural heritage of cultures in care and respect will ensure the sense of peace and brotherhood in the globalizing world to become established, and also will create a driving power for the development of a rich and multi-colored culture mosaic with the interaction of different cultures. New developments, which are realized without considering the national and historical values in architecture and city planning, speed up alienation in community. It is obligatory to preserve all kinds of structures bearing historical values that would ensure the transfer of culture to the next generations.

The number of historical buildings surviving from all such unfortunate incidents occurred in İzmir is extremely limited. The region where the structure of intense historical residences is present in the city is Alsancak, and the first of studies held with regards to such historical buildings is the model in Alsancak. Alsancak had previously been an urban site area but this has been changed and ten streets were put under protection by the Metropolitan Municipality of İzmir. Those buildings date back to the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century; most of them have now lost their original functions. Those buildings serve for different purposes other than being residences, and their subsequent function damages their original characteristics. It is necessary to take serious measures to ensure that these buildings are not damaged but survive sound. The Metropolitan Municipality of İzmir and Dokuz Eylül University initiated façade renovation studies in collaboration; however, those studies were interrupted due to financial impossibilities. Nevertheless, it is important to determine which measures should be taken in further façade protection studies. We made investigations in this study based on observations and negotiating with residents in the region in order to determine which measures should be taken. Then we presented suggestions in the light of the data we have obtained.

History and Historical Environment Structure of İzmir

The city has been under the domination of the Roman, Byzantine, Arabian and again Byzantine in order after Christ; then it has been transferred between the Seljuks and the Byzantine for a couple of times; afterwards, it has seen the periods of Çakabey, then the Byzantine and Anatolian Principalities; then has been under the sovereignty of the Ottomans; and it passed agitated periods under the domination of the Turks in the upper parts of city and Rhodium knights in the lower parts along the sea coast. It is known that the city of İzmir was transferred continuously between the Turks and Byzantine during a period of approximately four hundred years from the eleventh century until when the city was conquered by the Ottomans. Various nations established colonies constantly in İzmir in 1400s with the secret invasions of religious missions. Meanwhile, there has been created a community called the Levantine or the Europeans, who were peculiar to the region, as a result of marriage unions between each other and especially with the Greeks. All European origin foreigners were gathered under this name during the term Ottoman Empire; however, it is observed that any person, who originated from any country, born, got married and settled in Turkey, and adopted Greek language and customs, were called the Levantines (Beyru, 2000). Another group who lived in İzmir was the Armenians. It is esteemed that the Armenians came in the 14th century, and their population in 1631 was 8000. Another significant group was the Jewish. Galanté argues that the Jewish came to İzmir in large groups during the 16th and 17th centuries, when İzmir was developed as a large commercial center. (Galanté,1937)

(1893-94) the population of İzmir was over three hundred thousand, and it had a structure sheltering rather mixed ethnic groups. As the Western travelers mentioned frequently, İzmir resembled a federal republic due to ethnic distribution of population and due to the fact that each group was

organized separately. İzmir sheltered for years the communities from those different cultures and nations; therefore, such different ways of life were reflected to places of living, especially the residences, and brought them in different identities.

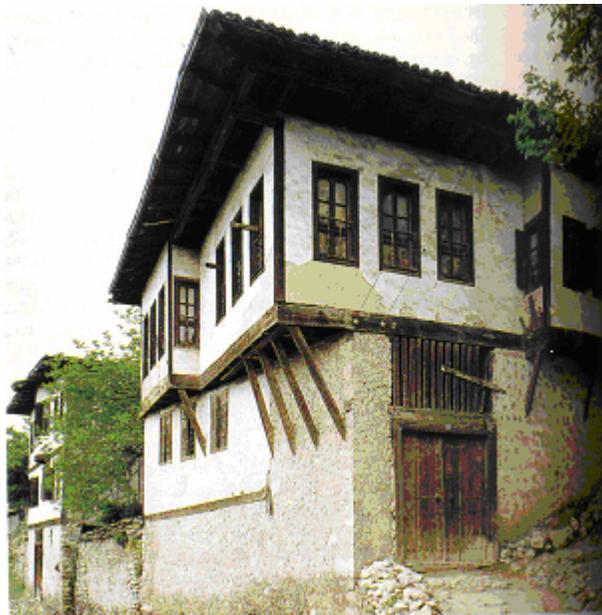
Figure 1: The place of İzmir in Turkey map



Traditional Residential Architecture in İzmir

The traditional residential architecture in İzmir is constituted of Traditional Turkish houses, Levantine and Greek houses. Traditional Turkish houses are overhanging residences with external or internal halls as well as build up ground floor and wooden framework upper floor. Those are opened to the street in minimum on the bottom floor due to privacy; they are affiliated with outdoors and the street from the upper floor, and they face the interior, the garden as a result of their essential character. The gardens include one or more of the elements such as wells, fountain and pool.

Figure 2: A Settlement bearing the Features of Traditional Turkish House



The examples of Levantine and Greek Houses may be seen in Alsancak, Mithat Paşa Avenue as well as Karşıyaka and Buca. Levantine and Greek Houses are in adjoining order; they have narrow

façades; and they have very similar characteristics with regards to plan and façade order. Examples are present in Alsancak and Mithat Paşa Avenue as well as Karşıyaka and Buca. They have build-up ground floors and wooden framework upper floors; the entrance floor has mostly side halls. Their plan is provided with a basement, two storied asymmetric façade and bay windows. It is possible to see examples in some streets with a basement and single floor without a bay window. Servicing places are located along the room facing the stairways and are connected to the garden. On the upper floor, the central distributional hall leads to bedrooms. Servicing places are located along the room facing the stairways and are connected to the garden.

Distinct feature of İzmir houses is partial or complete division of the overhanging, garden, same façade and plan order, hall and the servicing places. The analysis of symmetric or asymmetric types of residences with basements, two stories and bay windows, as defined as İzmir houses, cover all house types under the effect of West in the city.

İzmir-Alsancak Levantine Houses:

The initial Alsancak residents are the Greeks who came from the islands after the commencement of port construction in the middle of 1800s. In accordance with a study in 1895, there were two-three storied neoclassical buildings in İzmir from the Shore Line to Alsancak; and in general the Levantines (French, Italian, Dutch and English) and the Greeks lived in those houses. The French poet Victor Hugo did not visit İzmir at all but he was influenced as the city was established and named by an Amazon Queen, and thus attributed a feminine image on the city and called her the Princess. What Hugo imitated as a princess was not in fact the poor Turkish quarter of İzmir but the splendid European quarter. The European quarter is exactly the region which is included in the limits of Alsancak district of today. At the beginning of 20th century, this region was called as the small Paris. The Christians and Muslims lived in İzmir in two separate worlds without any slightest similarity. The regions, where the Turks lived in a section from the foots of Kadifekale to Eşrefpaşa, were cold, dark, neglected and introverted; whereas the Europeans quarter, alias non-Muslim İzmir was imposing to that extend. Alsancak was defined as ‘Punta’, the Greek term for “end”. Punta was first developed as a settlement structure with the streets intersecting perpendicularly in the second half of XIX century. The residences had a structure named as the Italian Style, and were lined up along the shore line and internal streets. The residences were also called as the Chios style and had 2-2.5 stories in general; they mainly faced the street and were connected to the courtyard by means of a servicing division at the back of parcel in depth. The Levantine and Greek houses are in adjoining order; they have narrow façades; and they have very similar characteristics with regards to plan and façade order (Akyüz,2004). The buildings from this period stretch along the two sides of Alsancak Kıbrıs Şehitleri Avenue and are still resisting.

Problems regarding Protection in our Country

In our country, large part of our cities has developed without plan during rapid urbanization after 1950s; reconstructions were seen in historical environments in the name of modernization. Irregular urbanization and rise of shanty houses are the principal reasons causing historical environmental structures to damage and disappear. One of the most important problems in preserving the historical environment is the fact that the improvement plan is not inclined to protection. The other problems may be grouped as follows.

Our country also participated in the efforts being continued and intensified on the international platform since 1970s. Our country adopted "Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Treaty" in 1983 along with the member countries of UNESCO; in accordance with the provisions of this treaty, the states have undertaken to protect cultural and natural riches within their lands. It is not possible to state that the policies for protecting the historical and cultural environment, which are continued in Turkey heretofore, have been successful. The migrations from rural to urban regions, and

rapid urbanization experienced especially after 1950, the second coastal plunder for residential and touristic purposes after 1980, migration from the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Region experienced after 1990 due to safety and economical purposes, all have turned upside down the balance of cities, which has been developed in hundreds of years. Illegal settlements (shanty houses) starting firstly in the suburbs of cities have surrounded the cities like cancer owing to developmental dispensations, and have become one of the major urban problems of today (Tunçer, 2001).

Problems in protecting the historical buildings in İzmir, and the Alsancak model

It is observed that the number of historical residences in the city decreases day by day and that they are not preserved due to various reasons. The problems experienced in İzmir with respect to protection may be divided in three titles: economical deficiencies, lack of technical knowledge, lack of awareness of protection. The easiest way to protect is to preserve the historical stone exactly. However, former decisions taken for the development plans, and permitting multi-storied settlements on historical environments caused the houses to damage economically. Two and eight storied buildings lining up in the same environment resulted in the owners of historical residences to experience destruction in the economic sense, and maybe throughout generations. Those people struggle against the conflict between protecting the cultural heritage and the economical wealth. In such a case, unfortunately, the property owners prefer the second way, and adopt the way not to protect from internal to external by means of decreasing the degree of buildings and then gradually precluding registration. They abandon the houses to faith or hold aloof against deterioration; they even tend to get rid of the historic buildings by choosing this way.

Rarity of technical personnel for restoration, rarity or lack of experts, lack of specific material, insufficiency of controls in application restrain from reaching the required solution. If a special workmanship is provided by those not really the experts of issue, or if any material in the market is used rather than the specific material, then the cost factor is affected as well as the technical quality. People's points of view with respect to protection, lack of awareness and sensitivity, and failure to believe its necessity affects negatively the success of protection. The poet Hugo, who had indelible marks in world literature, did not visit İzmir; however, he was influenced by the reputation of city, its legendary charm, and by the fact that it was established and named by an Amazon queen. His words were not address to the poor and wrecked quarters of İzmir but the European Quarter within the borders of Alsancak. The Levantines, Greeks, Jewish, other rich western people had been living in Alsancak. The buildings from this period stretching along the two sides of Alsancak Kıbrıs Şehitleri Avenue are still resisting with their distinctive and original architectures. İzmir could not preserve its historical values despite its rich past; it is necessary to show best efforts to transfer the historic buildings, constituting the identity and cultural heritage of city, to the next generations. Metropolitan Municipality of İzmir realizes many projects aiming to transfer the heritage of city dating back to thousands of years to today and the future. The first of studies performed in the city with regards to the structure of historical houses is the Alsancak model. Alsancak has been one of the urban sites of İzmir in the past but this has been changed and only ten streets are put under protection.

Most of those buildings dating back to the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century has lost their original functions today. The residences are Levantine houses with two stories and bay windows, and generally with the same plan and façade order. Some streets include single storied houses with basements. Large part of those is used for secondary purposes such as cafés, clubhouses, restaurants, offices, fashion houses, etc. Those functions attributed on the buildings subsequently damage the original characteristics of such buildings. The greatest destruction is a result of houses being abandoned because empty houses decay and vanish in time, or occupied by the homeless people. The streets in Alsancak, no. 1448 and 1449, have undergone a façade renovation fulfilled under Well-Kept Façades Project of İzmir city with the collaboration of Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Architecture; however, this project was interrupted because of financial impossibilities (Akyüz,2004).

Figure 3: The restored Levantine houses in Alsancak region



Figure 4: The restored Levantine houses in Alsancak region



Method of Study

All the houses, including the renovated ones, and the streets in the district of Alsancak were toured. Photographs of façades and streets were taken; unpleasant images in the streets and houses were identified. The residents were negotiated one-to-one; their opinions were heard with regards to what the visual disturbances affecting themselves were; how they might contribute in protection; or what they expected from the local administrations. Those observations and negotiations were evaluated; the problems were brought forward; and solution suggestions were developed.

Problems of Houses and the Region they are located, and Suggestions with regards to Protection

Lampposts in view from the streets; cables and wires crossing over the streets; electricity cables throughout the façades of houses create undesirable images, and present danger for the residents; therefore, the electricity system should be located underground (Figure 4-5).

Figure 4: Some houses with electric cables



Figure 5: Some houses with electric cables



Air-conditioners, stovepipes and installation pipes on the façades create an unpleasant visual pollution. A general ventilating system may be considered for those, and the equipment may be hidden and installed at the backyards of houses. Installation pipes and stovepipes should be removed; and the houses should be equipped with modern installation and heating systems. Additional stories build on

the houses subsequently ruin all the beauty, structure and unity of the buildings. Such additions should be pulled down and removed; permission should be granted for reconstruction. Cars parked on the streets prevent the houses from being perceived visually; therefore, streets where the houses are located should be closed for vehicle traffic; the streets should be covered with cobblestones in compliance with the nature of residences. Consequently, traffic signs should be removed (Figure 6-7-8).

Figure 6: Home samples air-condition systems on the facades and cars in front of the houses



Figure 7: Home samples air-condition systems on the facades and cars in front of the houses



Figure 8: Home samples air-condition systems on the facades and cars in front of the houses



Boards hanged in front of the houses, on their walls or in the middle of streets disturb the visual effect of façades, and create unpleasant views; therefore those should not be permitted. Some of the houses have ground floors converted into shops; those are sometimes covered with materials nonconforming with the original structure and façade characteristics of houses, and so damage the visual unity of façades. Altered doors and windows, or the spaces added or closed cause the façades to lose their original characteristics. Such applications should never be permitted; present ones should be removed, and new ones should be constructed with materials in compliance with the original as well as with the characteristics of façade (Figure 9-10).

Figure 9: Some of the houses have ground floors converted into shops



Figure 10: Some of the houses have ground floors converted into shops



Constructional problems observed in those buildings, which are generally constructed using stones, are the holes, salting and spots formed in time on the stone material because of weathering. Ivies and other plants surrounding the façades show emission in time and create acidic effect, and thus may cause superficial damages. Appropriate materials should be determined in accordance with the color and nature of original stone while protecting the façades; renewals should be made where necessary; or much protective materials should be determined, and the surfaces and cracks should be covered with chemicals that have protective, adhesive and filling features. Some of the façades are covered with plaster; however, plaster may disintegrate with the effects humidity of soil, or sun and weathering; this causes the buildings to appear worn and ruined. It is necessary that the façades are covered with modern façade materials that are in compliance with the original but that would not be affected from weathering. Ivies around the façades should be cleaned up. Wooden bay windows are darkened in time with the effect of sun, and become gray fibrous and unstable with the effect of rain waters. Those in such condition should be painted or repaired in compliance with the original (Figure 11-12).

Figure 11: Ivies and other plants surrounding the façades of the houses



Figure 12: Ivies and other plants surrounding the façades of the houses



Original color of stone buildings is the own color of natural stone in tones of gray, beige or earth color. Whereas, when the houses in those streets are painted in dark lilac, dark salmon, night blue colors, which do not suit the original at all, the houses lose their general characteristics completely, and their originality is lost. The paints on those houses with unpleasant colors should be cleaned by means of appropriate chemicals that would not damage the original material, and the original nature and color should be regained. After completion of all those aspects, the houses may be illuminated with decorative outdoor illumination components, and architectural design beauties of the house may be exposed for the purpose of ensuring pleasant appearance for the residences (Figure 13-14).

Figure 13: Some of the houses in different colors



Figure 14: Some of the houses in different colors



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