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Istanbul's Backbone – A Chain of Central Business Districts (CBDs)

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1. Introduction

Istanbul is one of the most attractive metropolis of Europe today. *Cultural capital of Europe in 2010*, the city is invaded by millions of tourists and ten thousands of business people every year. Istanbul is the primate city of a very self-confident Turko-Islamic state which is inhabited by nearly as many people as the population of Germany. The city is Turkey's keystone to Europe – that is more important as the commonly mentioned link between the continents. Recently Istanbul's position within Europe has been cemented by being chosen as Europe's capital of culture 2010. A remarkable exhibition (Istanbul 1910–2010) gave a detailed view to the urban development and structure of the city (catalogue: Bilgin 2010). Just before this, in 2009, the Urban Age Conference took place in Istanbul. Within a publication (Urban Age 2009) joined to that conference some relevant topics for modern Istanbul are mentioned: globalisation and the city's position (Keyder, Sudjic 2009), urban development (Güvenc & Ünlü-Yücesoy, Geniş 2009) and local trends (Aksoy, Sarkis 2009).

The urban development is hard to describe because it is changing very fast: what is constant in Istanbul is its permanent change. The growth of the city and the fragmentation of its core areas are well documented in different publications starting in the 1990s (Heller & Gerdes 1991, Dökmeci & Berköz 1994, Tokateli & Boyaci 1999) and continuing until recently (Ersoy 2009, Güvenc 2010). Seger & Palencsar contributed with a monography 2006.

Our attempt to characterise the metropolis and its development *focuses on its central business districts*. Recognising the urban morphology, several areas with special central functions, CBDs of the past or in action, create the unique diversity of ambience and richness of culture (McAdams 2007).

This article will focus on the following issues:

- Each of the periods of urban development in Istanbul *created their own and unique CBD*, spatially separated, especially from the Ottoman time.
- *Urban extension* in different periods (and not urban renewal) is the base of the *chain of CBDs*. Urban extension is a special way of *production of space*. The spatial separation of the “new and modern” grants independent development aside from the problematic infrastructures of older parts of the city.

- The “Chain of CBDs” consequently grew in several time periods, the location of the younger CBDs is related to the city’s recent focal points.
- As a result, a chain of *CBDs of different origin* and function represents Istanbul’s development from historical times to now. Due to the crucial functions of each of that CBD areas, the term “backbone” was created.
- Even the metropolis Istanbul is fragmented differently, the chain of CBDs marks a line of important urban spaces: the city’s backbone.

Each of these central areas is characterised by an individual scenery, founded in the period in appearance and sometimes subject to manifold change later on. In the methodology, to identify urban spaces by different perceptual variables, we use the ideas of *Kevin Lynch*: different areas are also distinguished by their *image*, that means by origin, shape, function and spatial pattern (Lynch 1960). The urban elements (CBDs) which will be presented in this article are identified by their different history, as well as by their special function nowadays. The knowledge for this is based on former investigations (Seger & Palencsar 2006, Seger 2010), catching the urban morphology for special issues as was done for Istanbul in parts before (geographically: Leitner 1981).

The chain of subsequently added CBD structures has two dominant and prominent final points – the *historical core* and the *post-modern skyscraper city*. In between, a continuous line of CBDs and central places form the backbone of the city, as Fig. 1 shows. Walking that line, one moves from Topkapi and the Bazaar area to the Galata bridge, reaching the İstiklal Boulevard and Taksim. Passing the nowadays crowded Şişli (Tosvekiye, Nişantaşı) one arrives at Gayrettepe, Levent and Maslak – the uppermost central areas today. In the following article one can repeat that walk. Chapter 2 illustrates features of the historic centre as the main cultural CBD and the touristic centre nowadays, chapter 3 deals with the modernisation at the end of the 19th century on both sides of the Bosphorus and at Pera. Chapter 4 analyses the rise of the city in the decades after WW II. Chapter 5 presents the northern and most innovative part of the chain of CBDs and in chapter 6 the specific urban form of the different CBDs of Istanbul’s backbone will be revisited.

2. Historic centre past and present – The backbone’s traditional CBD

The CBD of the monocentric city in former times leads to the Greece, Roman and Ottoman periods of Istanbul. The Greek city of Byzantium got its first imperial function when the Roman emperor *Constantine the Great* decided to choose it as his new capital in 330, naming it *Nova Roma*, and later Constantinople. A huge fortification, the Theodosian wall (379), remains nowadays in the early Byzantine period. The area east of that wall is the so called *Historic Peninsula* – delineated to the north by the Golden Horn Bay and to the south by the Marmara Sea (Photo 1). Due to the Byzantine monuments (e.g. the *Hagia Sophia*) and the later built Ottoman mosques and palaces (e.g. the architecture of *Mimar Sinan*) these areas of the ancient imperial town were chosen as *world cultural heritage sites* in 1985.

The partition of the Roman Empire took place in the year 395, the end of the Empire’s western part (with Rome as its capital) happened at the latest by 476. The East-Roman Empire and its capital Constantinople existed until 1453, when the surrounding Ottomans overtook the city. Weak in the last centuries for diverse reasons, Constantinople was a

successful stronghold in Medieval times, such as when in the 7th century it resisted the Arabic-Islamic. In that time Constantinople was the *primary global city of arts and culture*, especially in relation to the underdeveloped Central Europe.

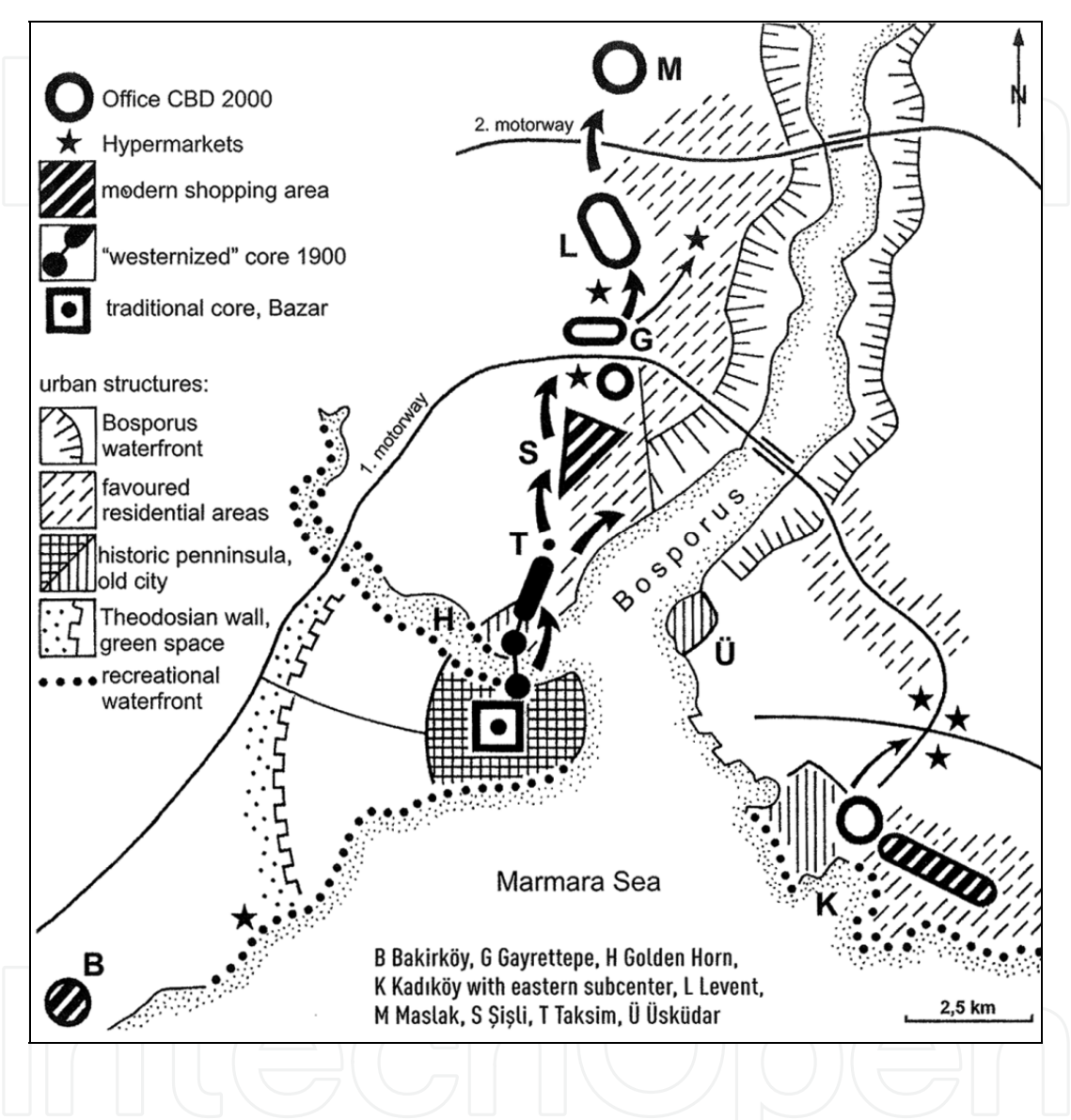


Fig. 1. Istanbul’s backbone – a chain of CBD areas from the historic peninsula via Taksim and Şişli (T, S) to the skyscraper areas of Levent and Maslak (L, M), 2010. A consequent movement of central urban functions towards the spatial hot spots of the city leads to that chain of CBDs. Draft: M. Seger

When the Ottomans took over the city, a new and very different layer of built culture formed the shape of the city. Form follows function, of course, but form follows in a very unique way *special cultural ideas*. So, the new Ottoman culture transformed Istanbul into a *showpiece of Islamic architecture*, and architecture is a reflection of culture. On the other hand, some remarkable pieces of Byzantine art did remain and were eventually transformed (the Hagia Sophia became a mosque), and other churches were also replaced by mosques. The



Photo 1. Historic peninsula, a world heritage site. Sultan Ahmet-Mosque (front), Hagia Sophia-Museum, Bosphor. Golden Horn left side. View northward to the Bosphor. Source: Keskin Color, 1985 (compare Fig. 1, 2).



Photo 2. Inside the Great Bazaar, a centre of shopping and tourism, 1992 (compare Fig. 2). Up to 1950 a centre of retail and wholesale as well as traditional handicraft.

Ottomans (whose former headquarters were at Bursa and Edirne) ruled in Istanbul from 1453 until 1918 and *Istanbul again became a global city*. Not only as the centre of Sunna-Muslims (Osmanic Caliphate 1517–1924) but also because of its military power (besiegement of Vienna 1683), at least up to the 18th century.

The change from the Byzantine to the Ottoman period is characterised by a remarkable *continuity of the locations* of urban functions. The acropolis became the sultan's stronghold with barracks and fortifications, and with a palace, the modern museum Topkapi. The main road at the peninsula's ridge is today the same as in Byzantine times, it connects the former emperor's quarters with the market area. This market area was the Roman-Greek *Forum*, where nearby the *Great Bazaar* (Photo 2) was founded. Even the residential areas and the harbour site at the Golden Horn/Chrysoceras/Halic were retained at the same location.

The *traditional CBD* kept its monocentric urban status up to the period of westernisation and modernisation during the 19th century. The sultan left Topkapi to his palace Dolmabahce at the Bosphor and new quarters were taken up at Pera (see chapter 3). The monocentric commercial functions remained until the late 1950s. Starting around 1970, the historic centre was given new *touristic functions* as well as developing shopping facilities – primarily for people from the socialist states in Eastern Europe. A world heritage site from 1985, the traditional core is nowadays a cornerstone of the Turkish identity and a vital part of Istanbul's economy. Revitalisation (Gezici & Kerimoglu 2010, Bütüner 2006, Ozus & Dokmeci 2005) and gentrification (Ergun 2004) have accompanied those new functions.

3. Fragmented CBDs in 1900: Early modernisation and bipolarity

During the 19th century (up to 1900) the city grew rapidly as the following data show: 1826 - 360,000, 1856 - 450,000, 1885 - 874,000 – and 1897 over 1 million inhabitants. In that time Istanbul was inhabited by a *multi-ethnic society*. Muslims were just in the majority (52%), Armenians and Greeks were 16% each and 4.5% were Jews. Additionally, 13% of the population (1897) were counted as foreigners (not Ottoman citizens), most of them being Europeans from different countries, mostly businessmen. In the decades before 1900 the political and economic relations of the Ottoman Empire to Europe had been reinforced. A *general modernisation* in urban form, mechanisation and industrialisation took place in the capital. Politically, the Ottomans lost their influence in south-eastern Europe (the Balkans), but the European empires had been interested in keeping up relations with the government at Istanbul – for intensive economic reasons. At the same time, and similar to big cities in Europe, town planning and modern urban infrastructure (building technology, electricity, mobility) occurred. A “*European*” part of Istanbul arose at Pera (Photo 3), a plateau north of the Golden Horn, connected with the Galata Bridge by an *underground cableway tunnel*, the first in Europe. The railway connection to Europe was constructed by 1873 and nearby another modern CBD grew up between the railway station *Sirceci* and the area surrounding the *Galata bridge* (see Fig. 2, shaped like a dumb-bell).

A bipolar city structure was a fact in 1900. How did the structures in the traditional centre look like and why did the city move toward the Pera hills?

At first, the traditional core between Topkapi and the Bazaar area (Fig. 1, 2) was the powerful centre of the *state's administration*: the Ministries of Finance, Interior, External

Affairs (Sublime Porte) and War (today: Istanbul University) had been located here in modern buildings. The big Bazaar area nearby covered numerous workshops, similar to the coastline at the Golden Horn. On the northern side of the Horn, and this is necessary to mention now, the quarter of *Galata* is unlike the other city areas. This quarter with its Mediterranean stone buildings was mostly inhabited by Europeans, and by Greeks and Armenians for centuries. The location of Galata and the neighbouring Pera were highly valued by France, the United Kingdom, the German Reich and Russia when they located their embassies there. Pera became the hot spot for the modern and urban lifestyle in Istanbul before World War I. Its centre, the *Istiklal Caddesi*, was a high level shopping area and Istanbul's first modern CBD. Located between the Tunnel and the Taksim-Place, its topographical position is significant for the location of the following urban centres.



Photo 3. Istiklal Cad. at Pera 2010. Westernised CBD of Ottoman Istanbul around 1900 (Grand Rue de Pera, compare Fig. 2). Renewed nowadays after blight till 1990.

By 1900, there was a bipolarity of the city centre and three different CBD areas were also distinguishable (see Fig. 2). One of them is the *traditional core* with governmental functions and the famous mosques: *Ottoman-Islamic identity* – surrounded by traditional urban work space. Remote from that, at the Pera plateau, a *segregated westernised society* had an everyday life similar to that in a European city. These residential, shopping and entertainment areas were one part of Istanbul's modern city. The other area was the CBD complex *on both sides of the Galata bridge*. Similar to the function of the bridge as a hinge, this CBD complex links the administrative core near Topkapi and the westernised core by the CBDs functions: a modern *economical administration* with banking and insurance offices, the main post office, with harbour facilities and the main railway station.

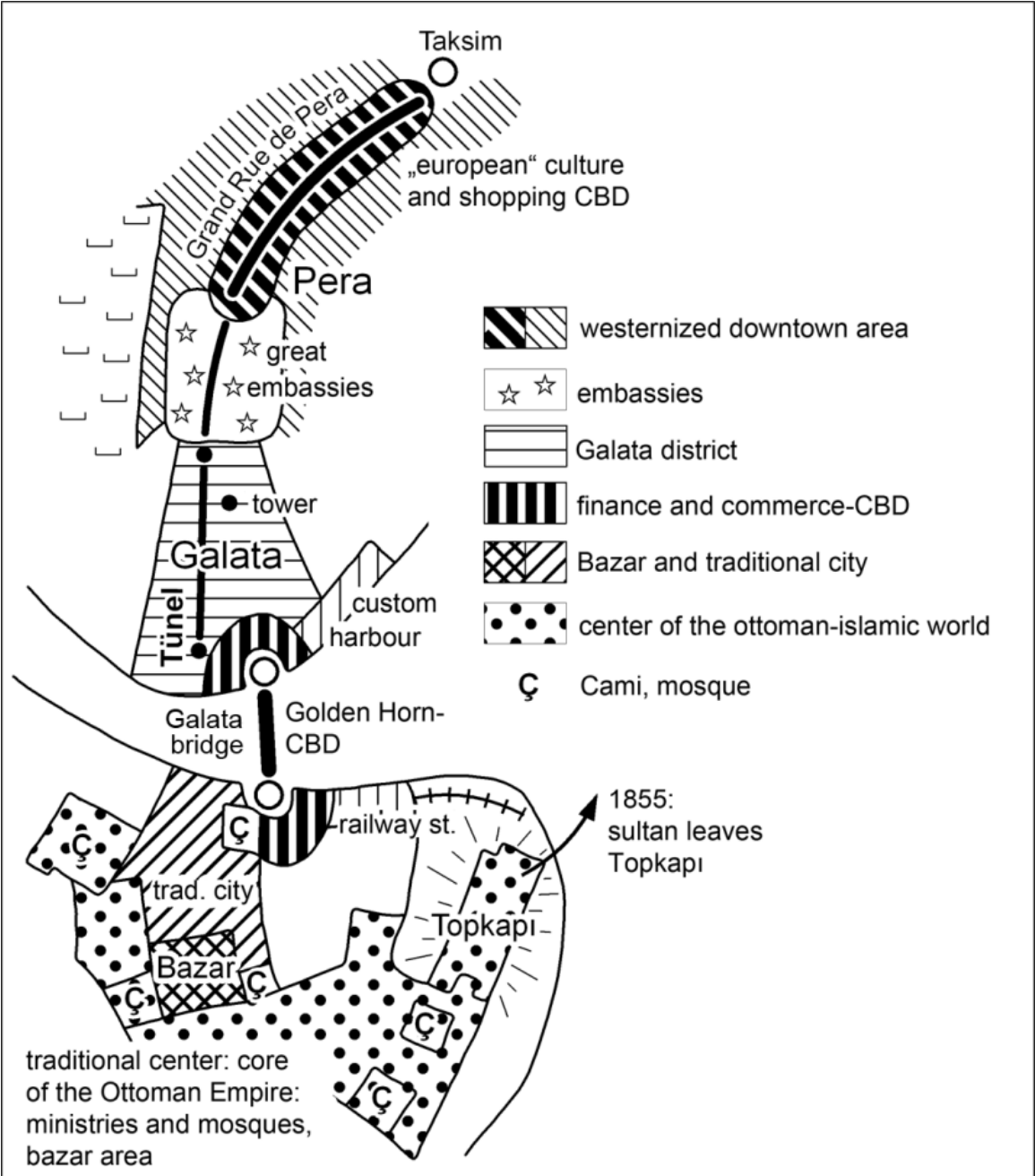


Fig. 2. Fragmentation at 1900: traditional core and two modern CBDs. Modern functions at new locations – the movement of CBDs starts. Draft: M. Seger.

The built up area of Istanbul did now (1900) cover both sides of the Golden Horn and also the area east of the Bosphorus: Aside the old bridgehead of Üsküdar Kadıköy became important. In Kadıköy, today Istanbul’s Anatolian centre, the head station of the Bagdad-railway was built.

4. Rising to a world city again: 1950 – 2000

The end of World War I (1918) was at the same time the end of the Ottoman dynasty, analogous the fate of the Habsburgs (in Austro-Hungary) and Wilhelm II at Berlin. For Istanbul the time that followed was extremely hard. When Kemal Pasha, a cavalry officer and leader of nationalist young men (who complained about the decline of Turkey) got the leadership of the post-Ottoman country, he decided upon Ankara as the new state capital. Turkey was a very undeveloped country in that time and the decision was correct, in respect to enforce modernisation in the Asiatic hinterland.

But for Istanbul the decision meant losing its international reputation with the embassies and other international organisations moving to Ankara. Another significant blow was the exchange of population between Turkey and Greece in the early 1920s, repeated in part in the 1950s: Istanbul lost most of its Greek and Armenian population. This seriously held back the city’s development for decades and turned it to a (mostly) monoethnic society. After a stagnant period (1920–1945), this situation was the starting point of the development after WW II, which is characterised as *a period of rapid growth, a changing urban structure and take-off phases* as shown in Fig. 3. For the corresponding spatial development see Fig. 4.

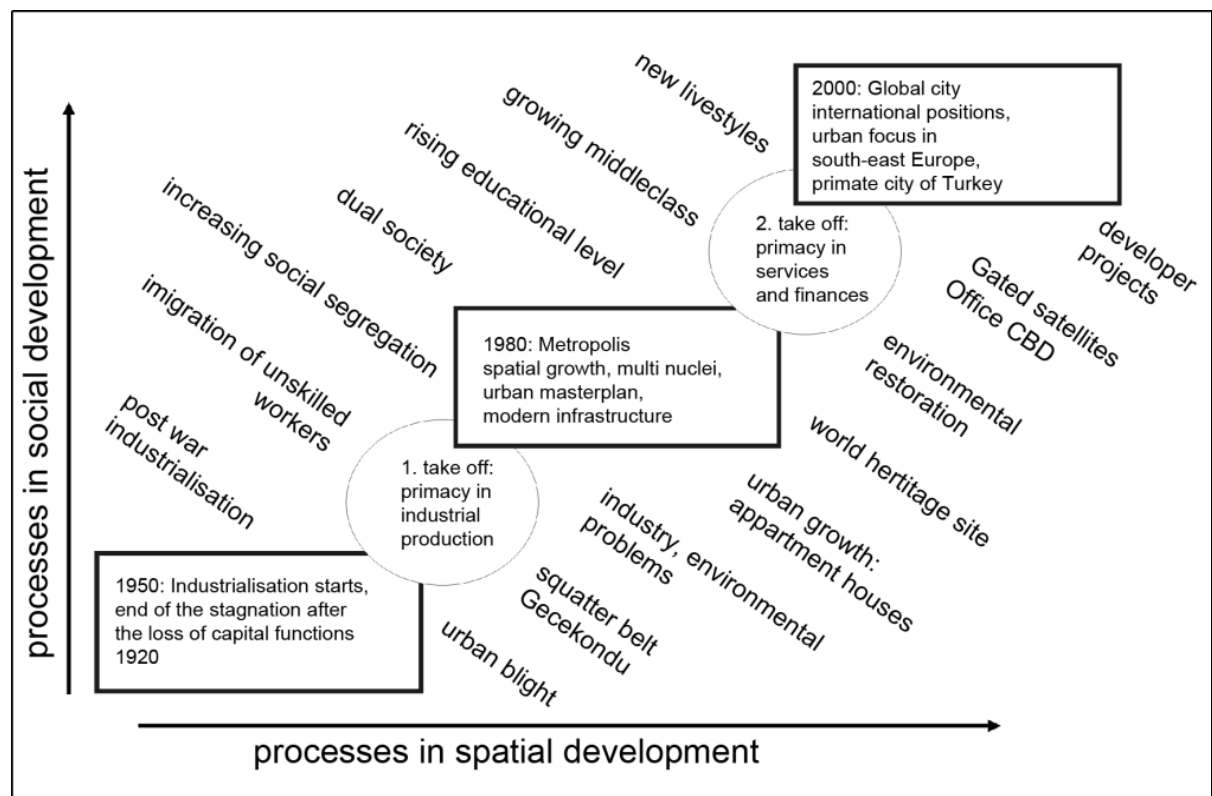


Fig. 3. Steps to a global city: the spatial change and social development of Istanbul 1950-2000. Three stages of urban development and two phases of “take off”. Concept: M. Seger.

In the decades between 1950 and 1970, Istanbul’s growth was driven by an intensive industrialisation, especially in the following branches: textile, leather, clothes, chemical goods and machinery. A city of 1.2 million inhabitants in 1950, this number rose to 1.9 million in 1960 and to 3 million in 1970. The growth of the population was dominantly caused by migration, mostly unskilled and from Anatolia. The industry was located west of

the peninsula, at the Golden Horn and on the Asiatic bridgehead of the city. The migrants built their squatter homes in general near to the factory sites, so called *Gecekond* – meaning ‘built over night’. A ring of *squatter areas* characterised the fringe of the city, its new inner parts dominated by apartment blocks. The direction of the growth at that time is documented in Fig. 4 and the fragmentation of the *shape of the city in three main parts* (Peninsula, north of Golden Horn, bridgehead in the east) produced several subcentres. Up to 1985 (1985: 5,8 mio. inhabitants) new industrial areas were founded and the crowded situation made it necessary to remove most of the industries out of the city - the start of *environment protection*.

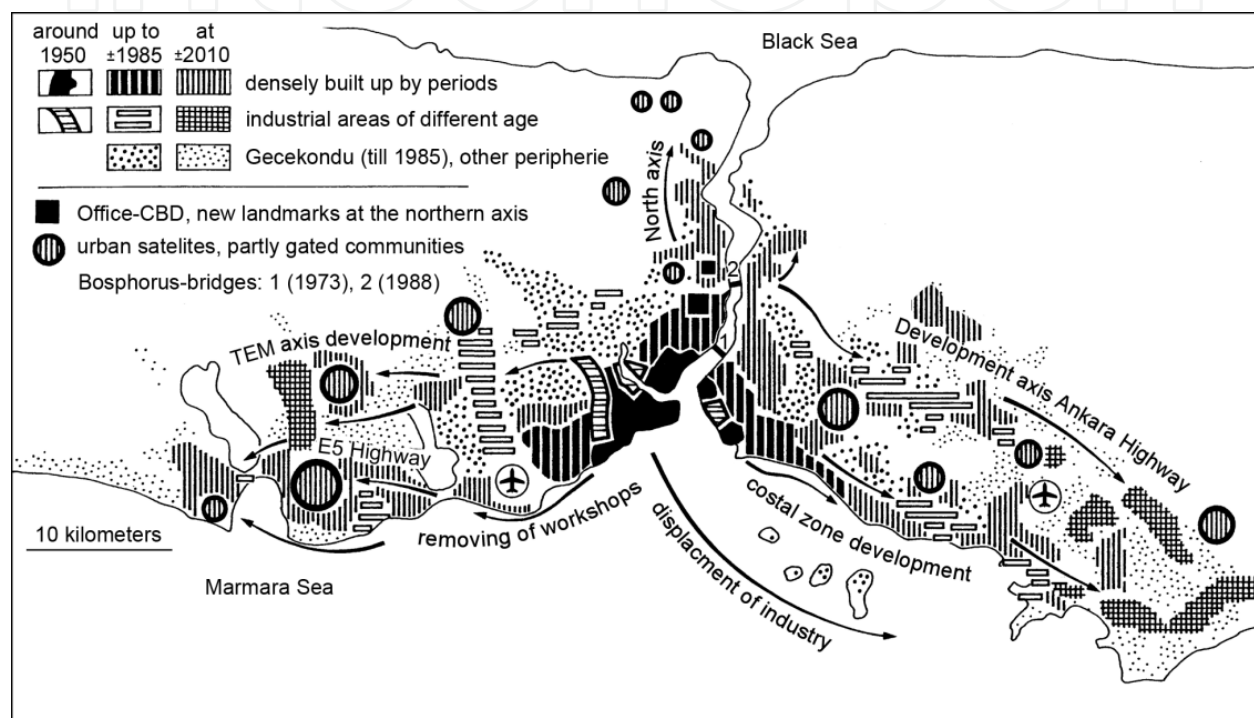


Fig. 4. Changes in the urban form of Istanbul 1950-2010: ribbon development at the seaside, growth and fragmentation, satellites and displacement of industry, belt of *Gecekond*, later upgrading. Draft M. Seger.

The CBD areas (Fig. 1) underwent the following changes in the period 1950–1970:

- At the *traditional core*, the Bazaar lost parts of its wholesale functions – but obtained new customers from the socialist satellite states. A Bazaar-mantle area (the Laleli district) arose with textile shops and hotels for those people as well as for western tourists. So the historic peninsula started to turn to new functions.
- Governmental institutions left the old city and the Golden Horn-CBD. That areas lost their former position and turned nearly to an inner city slum.
- Also the Tunnel-to-Taksim boulevard *Istiklal Caddesi* showed a heavy blight phenomena.
- An area of *expensive consumer goods* (Photo 4) grew north of Taksim square, see the *triangle* in Fig. 1 and the symbol “S” for the district’s name Şişli. The shops there are the

consequent reaction to the demand from a growing upper middle class only at Şişli and north of that area.

- Even though not a part of the CBD “chain”, one should not forget the centre of the *Trans-Bosporus-Istanbul*, the Kadiköy CBD (see Fig. 1).

The *industrialisation* brought Istanbul back to the prime position among Turkey’s cities and even before the fall of the iron curtain (1989) tremendous numbers of tourists from the so-called *socialist states* did their shopping tours in Istanbul. It was the time of *luggage trade* with the wholesale of western products at cheap prices. The low prices of Turkish goods are related to low wages for the working people in comparison to central Europe.



Photo 4. Road and shops in Şişli’s Golden Triangle near the Osmanbey metro station. Founded in the 1970s, the area has become the most fashionable shopping district nowadays, 2010, “S” in Fig. 1.

5. Recent development: Northern part of the city’s backbone – specialised CBDs in a globalising metropolis

Starting between 1980 and 1990 a *second take-off* of the city’s size, structure and position took place in Istanbul (see Fig. 3). The result nowadays is a booming metropolis (Güvenc 2010), a *city too big to fail* (Urban Age, 2009), with more than 13 million inhabitants in the metropolitan areas (the district Istanbul). The basic power for this development is Istanbul’s *primary city function*, which can be demonstrated as follows: 86% of Turkey’s headquarters are located in Istanbul and half of the 500 great industrial estates. The city shares 35% of the

state's commercial and service activities and contributes 43% to Turkey's tax revenues. Most of the foreign banking institutions in Turkey and most of the private universities are located in the city. More than half of Turkey's exports and imports take place in Istanbul and about 7.6 million tourists and shoppers from abroad (2009 approximately, 22% of Turkey's tourism) visited Istanbul. The relation *services:industry* in the formal sector is 62:38 (Istanbul Chamber of Commerce 2009). Istanbul is still a goods producing city, beneath the growth of the financial sector and related variables (which indicates a post-industrial and globalised structure). The revenues of the relevant employees rose and a new middleclass has now been created. Their new lifestyle is oriented on real estate as well as on consumer attitudes: 60 shopping malls were built in Istanbul between 2000 and 2005.

What does this mean in relation to *CBD development* within the last decade? At first, the tremendous growth of the metropolis is fragmented by different functions and levels.

The dominant new CBD structures are located in the middle part of the metropolis, *continuing the CBD chain with a north bound axis*; see Fig. 1. The region north of the "triangle" in Şişli is characterised by four facts:

- the area near the Bosphor is favoured as an expensive residential zone (see Fig. 1, Photo 5),



Photo 5. Konus-Hypermarket and Apartment-complex, Levent. Globalised aspects of architecture and lifestyle, "L" in Fig. 1.

- high ranking governmental institutions (Istanbul Technical University, Military Academy) and sports grounds mark the edge of the city near Maslak (M) and Levent (L),
- the accessibility of the whole area is excellent due to *two motorways* which connect the European and the Asian part of the town (Photo 6); Bosphorus-bridges: 1973, 1988.
- the CBDs from Maslak to Taksim square (M, T in Fig. 1) are connected by Istanbul's only underground (Metro) line, a prolongation to the historic peninsula is under construction.

Within that *Taksim to Maslak axis* the most recent CBD developments have taken place. Important to notice is the *spatial disaggregation* of the different types of new services. The financial CBD is spatially isolated from the city's shopping areas. The huge buildings signalize another proximity: that one to the *global financial market*. The financial sector created the office clusters at Levent (L) and Maslak (M) (Photo 7) and consumer services are concentrated at the "*triangle*" in Şişli (S).



Photo 6. At the crossroads: central motorway (left to right) crosses the main axis of the CBD chain, dominant building: Tat tower, Levent left, behind. Gayrettepe 2010, "G" in Fig. 1.

6. Conclusion: Chain of CBDs revisited

Summarising the different functions of the *chain of CBDs in Istanbul* – as shown in Fig. 1 – one can detect globalised and at least transnational aspects in each of them, as pointed out in the following.

Traditional core, world heritage site

Starting with the *traditional core*, it should be mentioned that this has been designated a UNESCO *world heritage site* since 1985. Istanbul's *brand awareness* is strongly related to the shape of the historic city which turned into a global touristic attraction. Characterised by Photos 1, 2.

Banking and Finance CBD

At the other end of the *backbone of the metropolis*, clusters of *skyscrapers* at *Levent and Maslak* are the metaphors for the city's powerful financial sector, post-modern and globalised at the same time. Their silhouettes contrast with those of the Ottoman minarets and the city's logo attempts to combine that. Vertical gated communities (apartment towers) and exclusive hypermarkets (e.g. Konus, leave Metro at Levent) are mixed with the office towers in that CBD area. Documented by Photos 6-7.



Photo 7. Maslak from south, Büyükdere Cad. Office towers right, vertical gated city left. Northern end of the chain of CBDs, “M” in Fig. 1.

Prime Shopping CBD

The ultimate hub for shopping and entertainment – now called the *golden triangle* – is a district in Şişli (S in Fig. 1). Clothing outlets, international brands as well haute couture can be found in the narrow lanes of Nişantaşı and Teşvikiye (Photo 4), the location of the city's *new creative class* (leave Metro at Osmanbey). It is remarkable that shopkeepers, formerly located near the touristic overcrowded Bazaar area are now moving to Nişantaşı with its upper class and international customers. Both the financial quarter and the “golden triangle” enlarge the imagination of Istanbul: they are *new post-modern locations*, spatially remote from the waterfront city at the Bosphor and the Golden Horn.

Fin de Siècle - CBD rediscovered

Proceeding southward, the space between the “golden triangle” and the traditional core is not at all an empty place. The fashionable CBD of 1900 south of the Taksim square (T), downgraded up to the 1970s, is now revitalised and a *city of pedestrian avenues* (Photo 3). The surrounding flourishes now as an entertainment quarter with different types of restaurants.

Galata bridge and the Golden Horn – the focal point of different intersections



Photo 8. At the Galata bridge 2010. Golden Horn, Focus of Istanbul's “multiple intersections”. Suleimaniye mosque in the background.

Coming down from the Pera plateau through Galata to the Golden Horn and to the Galata bridge, with the view to the mosques and their minarets, and surrounded by different noises and senses of smell one is entering another world. A permanent motion of people, vessels and cars creates an imagination: the *Golden Horn area*, this is the city's core for the common people.

At this busy waterfront with its socially and economically different functions (Photo 8) ends the presentation of Istanbul's chain of CBDs. At the waterfront one feels as though at a crossroads. Between Europe and Asia, ancient sites and modern quarters, between social levels, and between past and future. Away from the shoreline and on the way to the Asian bridgehead one can watch the skyline and the *chain of CBD* landmarks. Maybe that's Istanbul's secret: to be close to ancient times and simultaneously part of a global network.

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Cities are growing as never before and nowadays, it is estimated that at least 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas. This trend is expected to continue and simultaneously the problems in urban areas are anticipated to have an increase. Urbanization constitutes a complex process involving problems with social, economic, environmental and spatial dimensions that need appropriate solutions. This book highlights some of these problems and discusses possible solutions in terms of organisation, planning and management. The purpose of the book is to present selected chapters, of great importance for understanding the urban development issues, written by renowned authors in this scientific field. All the chapters have been thoroughly reviewed and they cover some basic aspects concerning urban sustainability, urban sprawl, urban planning, urban environment, housing and land uses. The editor gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr Marius Minea in reviewing two chapters.

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