

## ARKITERA SPATIAL STUDY: PROACTIVE ACTIONS

Ömer Kamupak, founder of Arkitera Architecture Center, Istanbul.

In Istanbul, it is quite rare to find a proactive attitude – one that identifies a problem and brings alternative solutions – about the city’s future growth. Politicians are beholden to business-as-usual and short-term political imperatives, while the schools of architecture and urban planning develop studio projects on sites and problems for mere educational purposes rather than as proposals for actual alternatives to the city’s development. Practising architects also rarely respond proactively to Istanbul’s problems because of the profession’s unforgiving culture of survival. The few civic actors operating in the built environment are likewise too disorganised and lack either the management capacities or financial strength. Given this situation, one could come to the conclusion that the municipalities and mayors of Istanbul have not had any proactive support or contributions for years.

Therefore, when Urban Age initiated a spatial study of Istanbul with the Arkitera Architecture Center, it was an opportunity not to be missed. Five young architectural teams were selected to propose solutions to the problems they detected as urgent issues for Istanbul. Free to choose the areas they would work on, it was each team’s responsibility to also define the problem they would develop an answer for. Thus three months of research resulted in five different proposals for five different areas and issues in Istanbul. They vary in scale and content, and although none of the proposed solutions are ready to be implemented, each of them demonstrates how a solution to neglected problems in Istanbul could be initiated.

Hopefully it is not too naïve to believe these proposals, or similar studies, could be utilised in the real-life management of the city. In the meantime, since decision-makers in our cities really do need clever solutions instead of harsh reactions, as professionals we should be prepared to collaborate rather than resist.

### *SO Architecture: nature next to the city*

Istanbul’s northern forests, home to the city’s fresh-water reservoirs, also provide fresh air to the city. These natural resources have been threatened by the encroachment of illegal settlements since the 1950s, and the bridges across the Bosphorus that connect the two sides of Istanbul. Now, the announcement of a third bridge has reignited the debate about the preservation of these forests. Despite strict regulations to preserve areas surrounding water reservoirs and the forests all over Turkey, especially in large cities, these laws are rarely enforced. On the other hand the emergence of ‘green’ terminology has almost transformed these urban forests, which until recently were either perceived as just green stains on a map for professionals or as mere spectacle for the public, into intangible assets.

SO Architecture focused on the Sultanbeyli area, a newly developed settlement on the edge of the northern forest of Istanbul. Their research asked an important question: how do you keep the forests free from illegal buildings? Without enhancing awareness of the public value of the forests, laws alone cannot protect the green areas of the city. According to SO Architecture’s proposal, the boundary between nature and the urbanised city should be utilised as public spaces. If they have the right to use this public corridor, the people living next to the forests are more likely to preserve the green areas.

In the plan, the corridor between the settlements and the forests will have nodes with public facilities such as libraries, cultural buildings, community centres, health clinics, schools, religious buildings or kindergartens. These nodes will sometimes be located within the urban tissue, thus carrying part of the forests into the built environment, but sometimes the nodes will be inserted slightly into the forests,

carrying the urban tissue into the green land. It is expected this will alter the boundary with the forest into a more integrated spatial field, connecting nature with the urban tissue like a zipper.

### *PAB Architecture: the neglected sister*

Halic, or the Golden Horn, became the neglected sister of the Bosphorus after becoming an industrial area in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Substantial efforts to clean up this brown field area replaced almost all of the industrial buildings with parks in the 1980s. However, this rapid rehabilitation eradicated many valuable industrial heritage sites and the newly constructed green parks were not planned adequately enough to attract local residents. By 2000, the area around the Golden Horn started to become an attractive tourist destination, although currently there is no masterplan to coordinate development.

According to PAB Architecture, the uncontrolled developments on the banks of the Golden Horn will eventually break the connections within the existing residential tissue. Without a masterplan many facilities are being constructed without any relation between them. If this process is not stopped, the future of the Golden Horn may again be as it was a hundred years ago, but this time not as an industrial brown field but a deserted spoiled graveyard of tourist facilities. Therefore PAB propose to extend a portion of the urban tissue into the empty green fields on the banks of the Golden Horn. These new clusters are intended to release the pressure on the existing urban tissue and to adjust the balance of empty green parks by creating multi-use structures that include housing, small offices and commercial facilities. These building clusters will also act as visual and physical bridges to the residential areas behind the road along the coast.

### *8ARTI Architecture: reclaiming the valleys*

8Arti examined two defining, intertwined features of Istanbul: its skyline and its valleys. The magnificent skyline of Istanbul's historic peninsula is a result of the clever utilisation of its topography. In 1936, a proposal to preserve this skyline stipulated that 40 metres above sea level, no new buildings should exceed 9.5 metres in height. This principle is still in

force today, and has ensured the preservation of the historic peninsula until now. However, the city's rapid urbanisation has led to new settlements reaching the edge of the northern forests, which has almost hidden this topography with a homogeneous blanket that neglects the city's dominant and unique geographic features and differences.

The valleys act as ecological corridors that regulate air circulation within the city while they also collect and direct rainwater to the coast. However, until now those valleys have been considered as barriers for urbanisation: their riverbeds are covered and their banks are filled with, sometimes illegal, apartment blocks with insufficient infrastructure and social facilities.

8Arti chose a small valley reaching from the Levent business district to the Kagithane area as its project site. In applying an alternative 40-metre principle, 8Arti proposes to clear all buildings between sea level and 40 metres above the valley basin and to transform the valley basin into a green public space. After this reclamation, the displaced population will be re-housed in the buildings to be erected above the 40-metre line above the valley basin. However, these new building settlements will be designed to accommodate an equal population and more social infrastructure with a more efficient planning code and a 'super-social' building for libraries, religious buildings, health and educational facilities.

### *GB Architecture: revisiting the perimeter block*

By the 1950s uncontrolled immigration to Istanbul had started to cause rapid urbanisation of the city. As a result, the free-standing multi-storey apartment building became the model people believed would solve the housing problems for Istanbul's citizens. This building type proliferated across the city, neglecting geographical, social, economical or even ecological differences. Urban forms and building codes were all adapted to regulate the spread of this type, which in turn created a dull urban pattern. The current activities of the housing development authority of Turkey (TOKİ: Toplu Konut İdaresi) also boost the proliferation of these independent generic tower apartment blocks, which are now being built on the periphery of Istanbul.

GB Architecture proposed to reinvent the perimeter block as a new urban form for Istanbul. Choosing a large area near Kucukcekmece, they argued that the current urban planning codes that encourage the building of independent tower blocks, are inappropriate for the city since they do not create enough public and semi-public spaces. Therefore, they developed a new masterplanning guide by first designing the areas within the perimeter blocks to allow alternative uses, multiple functions and varying floor plans. The resulting blocks create different forms of courtyards, with horizontal or vertical slabs that integrate with each other to act as a coherently working machine, as well as a defined urban space. This study also seeks to address the masterplanning of certain sites in Istanbul; GB believes special studies rather than an application of predetermined building codes should prevail to allow the diversity of the urban tissue to accommodate the diversity of the city.

#### *Superpool Architecture: the other half of Istanbul*

How do you plan a parking strategy in a city that has more than 2.5 million private cars, with a daily increase of 400? Currently Istanbul can accommodate only 250,000 or so parked vehicles, mostly at sites maintained by the municipality's parking company. And while new building regulations demand parking spaces to be reserved in the planning phase, the old settlements do not have adequate car parking facilities. Given this situation, one can assume that most of the streets and open urban spaces are occupied as car parks, which comes close to the total land area occupied by buildings in Istanbul.

Superpool Architecture decided to focus on the use of streets as public spaces. Istanbul is well known for the lack of planned and designed open spaces for the public. Given this situation one might expect that Istanbul's open areas lack public life. However, Superpool chose two different sites to illustrate the opposite: one within the historic peninsula in Karagumruk on the European side, and another on the Anatolian side in a relatively recent settlement called Namik Kemal. The latter has a more regular street pattern compared to the organic pattern of Karagumruk. In Istanbul, public life is very vivid on the streets and defies any predictions

or plans. The improvised public use of the streets is a key factor to consider while designing for Istanbul. However, most of the streets are largely occupied by parked cars which leaves little space for pedestrians or neighbourhood residents.

Superpool proposed to build parking structures within two minutes' walking distances in the two earmarked neighbourhoods and they proposed to use some of the streets as pedestrian areas or public spaces with restricted access by car. Some of the secondary streets will be turned into public parks with drop-off zones for cars, while some will function as playgrounds for children. Some may even be used as small-scale organic agricultural sites for the residents. This relocation of the cars and reclaiming of parking spaces will require a minimal intervention but will create the maximum amount of open air spaces that can be used by residents. The newly developed parking structures will require their own management plans and also include some commercial and social facilities for the community. The management plans of these parking structures will need to be developed in such a way that they allow long-term economic sustainability.

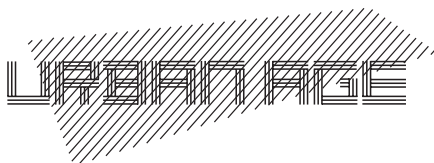
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