



ISTANBUL

TURKEY

KEY FEATURES OF THE CITY

Demographic Facts

- About 14 million inhabitants

Heritage

- Registered heritage: Historic Areas of Istanbul
- Inscription: World Heritage List
- Date of inscription: 1985

EXISTING GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

Development and Management Plans

- Istanbul Development Plan
- Istanbul Environmental Plan

Responsible Authorities

- TOKI Housing Development Authority of Turkey
- IMM Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality
- Local districts
- Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Centre
- GYODER (Association of Real Estate and Real Estate Investment Companies)
- KonutDer (Residential Association)
- InDer (Association of Construction Companies)
- GISP (Center for Strategic Thinking in Real Estate)
- Kentsel Vizyon Platformu (Urban Vision Platform)

Legislation for the protection and management

- Municipality Laws
- Law no. 5366 for the Protection of Dilapidated Historical and Cultural Real Estate Through Protection by Renewal
- Law on the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Assets
- Tourism Encouragement Law

MAIN ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

- expansion of the metropolitan area and service coverage
- need for housing renewal
- management earthquake risk
- management of unplanned and rapid urbanization
- infrastructural improvement in terms of transportation system
- environmental protection

KEY ASPECTS OF THE CULTURE-BASED REGENERATION STRATEGIES

- Cultural tourism and intangible heritage
- Housing projects and urban growth



9.5 Istanbul

Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey and a transcontinental centre, situated on two narrow peninsulas separated by the Bosphorus at a unique strategic position between Europe and Asia. Considered as a global city, Istanbul is one of the great metropolitan areas and of the fastest-growing economies in the world, recently developing as a tourist city. Istanbul, however, recent changes in the physical environment have taken a different path from that of the past and the city is suffering from unplanned and accelerating urbanization. Unlike the majority of the selected European case studies, urban regeneration projects in Istanbul are not related to the redevelopment in the post war period or to the need to revitalize the city centre, abandoned due to urban sprawl.



8.5.1 Key features of the city

The many layers of history that shape Istanbul result in a complex and overlapped structure of heritage and “speed urbanisation” (Sudjic, 2009: 3), that makes the only city in the world that straddles two continents, the 5th most visited city in the world, with a tourism income growth rate of over 30% over the next decade.

Demographic facts

With a population of nearly 14 million inhabitants, Istanbul forms the largest urban agglomeration in Europe and the sixth-largest city in the world. The metropolitan area of İstanbul is limited to the city borders, which covers around 5.300 km² and has a density of 2.400 inhabitants per km². However, the presence of physical barriers result in a liner band where the major part of the city population lives, stretching for about 100 kilometers and with a width of 20 kilometers (Güvenç, Yücesoy, 2009: 52). Istanbul’s population has quadrupled since 1980 (Sudjic, 2009: 4), and studies by the Turkish Statistics Institute (2013) estimate that the city can reach a population of 16.6 million in 2023.



Urban figures

Shaped by the “surviving fragments of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman civilizations” (Sudjic, 2009: 3), Istanbul has a very diverse historical heritage.

The different civilizations that have inhabited the city’s territory until the formation of the state of Turkey in 1923, contribute to the current urban form of the city. Among these, the Islamic Ottoman civilization was the one that contributed most to the city’s present shape, both physically and culturally.

Heritage

Since 1985, the historic center of the city is partially listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site with the definition of “Historic Areas of Istanbul (Archaeological Park, Süleymaniye quarter, Zeyrek quarter, zone of the ramparts)”.

The four inscribed areas display architectural achievements of successive imperial periods and exceptional examples of peculiar building types of the city. Furthermore, the districts of Fatih and Beyoglu both located in the historical centre of the city deserve special attention.



8.5.2 Existing governance mechanisms

Development and management plans

In Istanbul, urban transformation and historic preservation have been combined in a complex management system. There are two plans prepared for Istanbul city: Istanbul Development Plan and Istanbul Environmental Plan.

The **Istanbul Development Plan** is a regional tool prepared by the Turkish Ministry of Development, Istanbul Development Agency in order to reach Turkey's 2023 vision. It represents the highest local plan under the national development plan, and focuses on Istanbul's socio-economical development trends and potentials, as well as on priority intervention areas and sectoral objectives.

The **Istanbul Environmental Plan 2009** — prepared by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality — is based on city borders of Istanbul due to existing legislation and foresee city based strategies. The basic approach of the plan is aimed at interweaving the city's development with the preservation of authentic cultural and natural identity, as well as reaching global competitiveness and high quality of life. In planning studies polycentric and balanced regional development approach is considered and harmonization within Trakya and Kocaeli Environmental Plan is provided.

Responsible authorities

In Istanbul, the existing planning structure is characterized by three major players with their respective key assets and specific role in the process:

- the **Housing Development Authority of Turkey (TOKI)**, that acts at the interface between the Office of the Prime Minister and the private sector, by forming partnerships with development companies, sharing programmes with private developers, and managing mass housing, but also credits and bonds;
- the **Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM)**, that constitute a governmental body aimed at supervising the 39 local districts of the city, allowed to propose developments within them and to implement state-sponsored programmes across their levels. Through its departmental structure, the IMM acts on a wide range of aspects, including planning and culture, as well as financial services.
- the **39 local districts**, which represent the decentralized component of the overall centralized system. Though they intervene under the Municipality, they show their increased autonomy is the capacity of proposing developments within their own borders without the approval from higher-level bodies.
- the **Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Centre** holds a direct role in relation to cultural tourism led urban regeneration in the city. The unit claims that: “cultural heritage, museums, culture and art festivals and congress tourism are not only crucial to promote Istanbul on the global scale but also equally significant for a live and vivid urban cultural life”.

Furthermore, the collaboration with many additional agencies play a fundamental role in the development and regeneration processes undergone by the city, including: TOKI Housing Development Authority of Turkey, GYODER (Association of Real Estate and Real Estate Investment Companies), KonutDer (Residential Association), InDer (Association of Construction Companies), GISP (Center for Strategic Thinking in Real Estate), Kentsel Vizyon Platformu (Urban Vision Platform).

Legislation for the protection and management

In Istanbul and Turkey, the legal framework and organization has rapidly developed, in relation to the speed of the transformation processes. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a series of changes has brought to a new framework with a direct effect on urban renewal projects developed, also addressing issues of transparency and participation.

In 2004 and 2005 the current **Municipality Laws** have been introduced, expanding the physical space under the jurisdiction of the greater municipality, thus giving it control of the district municipalities. At the same time, this new framework facilitated the establishment of partnerships and collaboration between municipalities and private companies, so as defining a first draft of a legal framework for “mega-projects”. Particularly, the new law in 2005 separated urban renewal and regeneration.

Starting from these premises, the **Law for the Protection of Dilapidated Historical and Cultural Real Estate Through Protection by Renewal** (no. 5366) was passed in 2005, together with further laws aimed at enabling the urban transformation of the city by giving the municipalities the authority to implement urban redesign projects without having to face the standard regulations in the legal system (Candan and Kolluoğlu, 2008).

Additionally, two further legislations should be taken into account: the **Law on the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Assets**, which defines that nearly 10% of the land of Istanbul is registered as conservation areas (Dinçer et al., 2009); and the **Tourism Encouragement Law** — prepared in 1982 — that provides incentives to the private sector and a legal basis for subsidy for the development of tourist facilities (Kocabaş, Yüksel et al.).

8.5.3 Main issues to be addressed

The main issues behind the regeneration and development projects in Istanbul include: the **expansion of the metropolitan area and service coverage**, also referring to the **need for housing renewal** due to aged building stock; the **management earthquake risk**; the **management of unplanned and rapid urbanization** as well as urban sprawl; infrastructural improvement in terms of transportation system and environmental protection.

At the same time, **management of tectonic challenges and earthquake risk** represents a fundamental issue, since the city is Turkey’s most risky area and the catastrophic Marmara Earthquake that happened in 1999 (Goksin & Muderrisoglu, 2005: 7) has been one of the main breakpoints in the urban regeneration processes in Istanbul (Goksin & Muderrisoglu, 2005: 7).

8.5.4 Key aspects of the culture-based regeneration strategies

In a city “with more than enough of the usual urban problems, but that also has the energy and the resources to stand a chance of addressing them” (Sudjic, 2009: 4), urban regeneration projects involve creating a new pattern of urban restructuring.

The main urban regeneration areas of the city are Fikirtepe, Esenler, Atasehir, Kartal and Gaziosmanpasa, together with further potential sites, such as Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, Adana and Gaziantep.

The key aspects of the regeneration strategies for the city are directly related to the main identified challenges, and can be defined through three main thematic areas.

Cultural tourism and intangible heritage. According to the new legal framework and the related planning instruments, cultural tourism has been meant as an inevitable aspect of urban regeneration processes, mainly for what concerns the “showcase of the city” (Turgut and Özden), namely the Historical Peninsula and the Golden Horn. The potential value of cultural tourism as a factor that can contribute to the growth and stabilization of region’s internal economy (Turgut and Özden) has always been suggested in Conservation Plans. Therefore, cultural tourism oriented regeneration projects in Istanbul are recently included on government agendas. Today, development of cultural tourism strategies is the main objective for several regeneration projects, primarily set for registered residential zones, tourism areas and waterfronts. Intangible heritage, one of the main tools to bring cultural motifs to tourism, has a significant role in culture led urban regeneration, considering that Turkey signed The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, prepared by UNESCO in 2003. On the other hand, as the Historical Areas of Istanbul — inscribed on the WH List as one of the first sites in Turkey — is the main focus of many regeneration initiatives, the physical regeneration of urban heritage constitutes a key factor for investment and tourism.

Housing projects and urban growth. In the latter fifteen years, the increase in population demands for housing projects able to face with the remarkable demographic growth — also due to the new waves of migrants — from 8.8 million inhabitants in 2000 to over 14 millions people in 2015.

Social groups and decision making. Urban mega-projects reinforce the neoliberal logic by redefining the spaces of the poor and the rich. Social groups have been contesting these projects, since the population is not involved in the decision making process and the majority does not benefit from them. The outcomes of this process can be assessed through the case of the Gezi Park, where in 2013 the protests against the destruction of one of the last green spaces in central resulted from redevelopment of the Taksim area.

8.5.5 Outcomes and lessons learnt

Though some projects caused several disputes and debates concerning social aspects and urban identity, some fundamental outcomes derive from the case-study, primarily addressing the role of cultural tourism and partnerships in regeneration processes.

Cultural tourism led regeneration. According to the interpretation provided by Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Centre unit, about the role of “cultural heritage, museums, culture and art festivals and congress tourism (...) to promote Istanbul on the global scale but also equally significant for a live and vivid urban cultural life” (Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Centre), Istanbul’s tourism potential has been reconsidered in accordance with the changes in the cityscape, so contributing to the growth and stabilization of overall region.

Partnerships and collaboration between institutions and other agencies. Public-private partnerships provide a valuable contribution to the urban regeneration processes in Istanbul, where some companies collaborate with associations, to provide a multi-sector approach.