

Morphologic Assessment of Istanbul Beyoğlu Peninsula In the Process of Reproducing the Urban Waterfront.

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Abstract

“Water”, the main signifier of Istanbul had different meanings for the city specifically starting from Haliç (also known as the Golden Horn) to the Bosphorus. During the long period of urbanization, Haliç became the backbone of integrated historical sites that encounters different morphologic characteristics. Despite deep cultural, social and geographical roots integrating its identity with the water, today Istanbul’s city centre is under the risk of turning its back on the waterfront because of currently planned spatial interventions. Lack of connections and flows are separating this vibrant city centre from the coastline. In this assessment, the spatial qualifications of the waterfront of Beyoğlu Peninsula examined according to morphologic values in order to re-associate it with its hinterland.

During the 1950s and 60s, a modernizing ideology of new production methods guiding the spatial planning policies had transformed the waterfront of Istanbul, creating barriers between the city centre and the water. Especially, along the Beyoğlu Peninsula following the coastline from Besiktas to the Haliç shipyard the barriers have a massive effect. While the new urban planning ideology of the 80s was predicting the decentralization program for waterfront, the city centre has had a new chance to create the potential for the use of spatial voids within the solid structure of the old urban fabric. Unfortunately, during the last decade, these potential public areas, consisting of warehouses, shipyards, industrial plants and customhouses of mostly industrial heritage buildings were enclosed in privatization programs under the guidance of a real estate market based on certain urban transformation policies. Istanbul’s waterfront; without any spatial or social context of a holistic plan, is needed to be understood as a part of an existing urban morphology and assessed as potential public area where city meets the water again.

For Istanbulies, reaching the Bosphorus and touching the water not only reflects the desire for public space as envisioned by western culture but also the way of living in and the meaning of being part of, Istanbul. Hence, these potential areas of transformation should not be expected to serve only for touristic activities, hotels and shops or so called public spaces but also for local needs and desires. They are increasingly important as a means to reconnect the city to the water because of their importance for local identity, and thus to the true life of the city.

This assessment is aimed at determining how to integrate the waterfront into urban morphology through using the basic information obtained from spatial questioning and examining the mappings of urban corridors and the desire of flows.

1. Integrated Urban Morphology of Central Istanbul

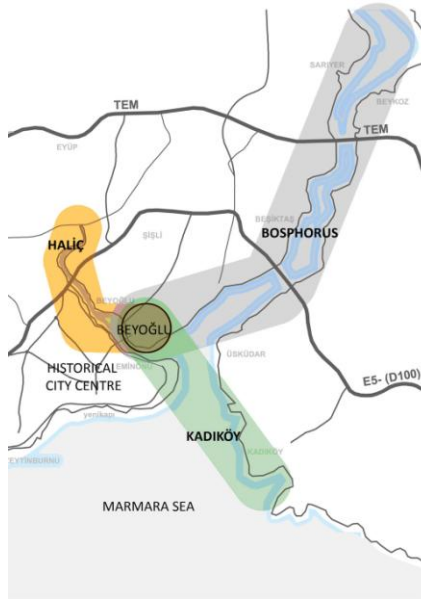


Figure 1: Istanbul Water Corridors

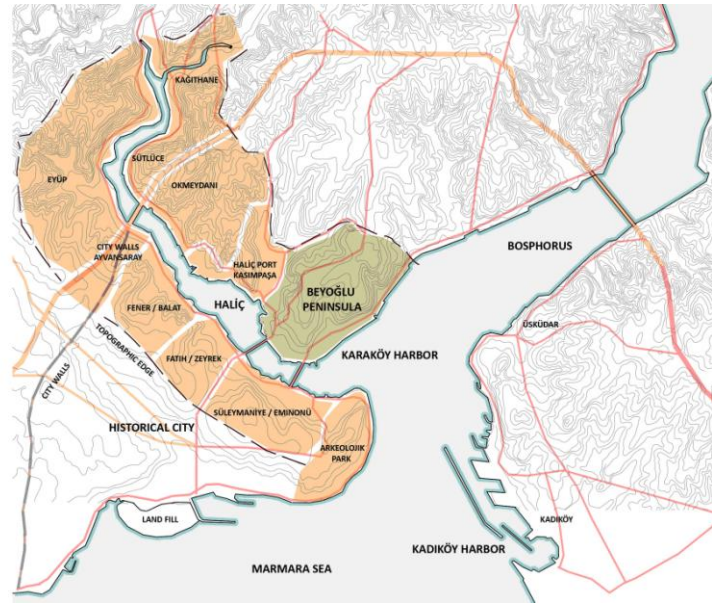


Figure 2: Haliç, Integrated Urban Network

Central Istanbul's spatial development has a strong relation to its coastlines. The Bosphorus, Haliç and Kadıköy coasts line three major water corridors connecting the urban structure. The Beyoğlu Peninsula as the centre of these corridors has a strategic importance for these systems. The Haliç corridor has been playing an important role in the development of the city through time because of its location facing the old city centre and as the inner harbour. Over the centuries of its urbanization period the Beyoğlu Peninsula has been the key to Istanbul's connection with the world outside. Karaköy Harbour still serves as a cruise port and carries the mission of international linkage. To the north, the Bosphorus corridor connects the city centre with former coastal villages and serves as a public transport route. At the beginning of 20th century, piers, small harbours and docks along the Bosphorus have been used as the stepping stones for urban development until road networks connected these settlements across the land. The Kadıköy coast has not only connected Istanbul to the world with its container port, but links the Asian side of the city to the historical centre.

The Haliç corridor diverges from the other water corridors when considering the assessment of the area as a whole. This natural harbour served as a backbone network to stimulate central urban development at each historical period and hosted the contemporary needs that eventually transformed the city. From this point of view the Haliç corridor can be considered as an incubator for urban development in control of the Beyoğlu Peninsula. Haliç-born transformations had holistic effect on urban structure and left traces of exciting urban morphology on the city's architectural, historical and cultural urban heritage. Today's "urban voids" along the coastline are the traces of this heritage awaiting new urban transformation.

It is still possible to observe the integrated structure of different subzones and districts along the both sides of Haliç as Süleymaniye, Eminönü, Zeyrek, Fatih, Fener Balat, Eyüp, Okmeydanı, Kasımpaşa and Beyoğlu.

Throughout their history, the urban morphology of the historical peninsula and Pera, at the tip of Beyoğlu, was driven by events and facts dependant on water. Although the settlements along the Bosphorus were developed to take advantage of waterline transportation, the urban pattern of Beyoğlu Peninsula was developed according to different urban dynamics (Kuban, 2010). Beyond the walled city of old Galata, the 16th century urban morphology of

the Beyoğlu Peninsula started to develop on the hilltop due to the construction of consulate buildings. This urban pattern expanded to the waterfront, following the development of Pera, and fed from the coast through piers and docks located at Karaköy and Tophane.

The Tophane district, with a suitable topography for open public spaces has been a focal point for social integration. The Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque and Ottoman public buildings - bath, school, and fountains - defined the area during 16th century (Müller-Wiener, 1977). In the following periods, this area has been used for military and industrial purposes due to logistic and strategic reasons. The Ottoman modern army and artillery compound gave an identity to Tophane. The existing docks of Galataport have been built during the transformation period of the modern Turkish Republic. The Haliç shipyard, since 15th century, has been the industrial innovation spot and engineering bay for reforming the Ottoman Empire and has been used for civil purposes until recent time. Throughout history, the small ports and piers connecting the historical city centre across Haliç have created a picturesque view of Istanbul. Beyoğlu watching the old Istanbul is what makes it meaningful.

The case of this assessment of today's waterfront of the Beyoğlu Peninsula, starts from the Haliç shipyard, continues through Perşembe Pazarı, Karaköy Square, Karaköy Port and warehouses, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Fındıklı Park and the Kabataş Transfer Station. The total length of the waterfront is 3.8 km. long.

2. Planning, Investments and Desires

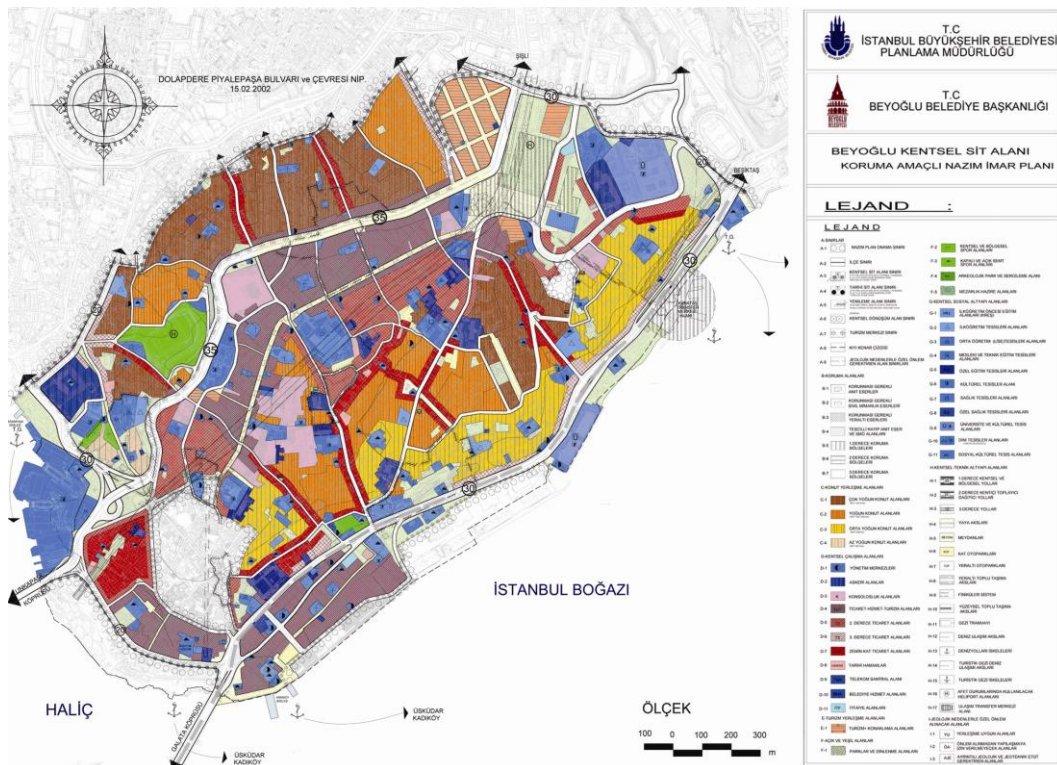


Figure 3: Beyoğlu Urban Conservation Plan (Istanbul Greater Municipality, 2010)

The planning process of this unique historical and cultural side became the bone of contention during last 5 years. Finally, The Beyoğlu Urban Conservation Plans (2010) have been taken to administrative court and were cancelled due to not being compliant with upper scale plan decisions and not consisting of participatory planning models (10th Administrative Court, Istanbul. Decision Number: 2013/1665, Issue: 2011/1094). Also, the partial approach of the plans has been criticized. Unclear decisions in the plan revealed it to be a tool for investors rather than a plan for conservation.

In addition to unique historical settlements like Galata and Pera there are also important spots like the Haliç Dockyard, Persembе Pazarı, Karakoy Port and Galata Port which are currently under discussion for urban transformation. Despite their importance, the urban space of Persembе Pazarı and Karaköy coastline are being shown as urban voids in the plan. In fact, this is the waterfront of the Beyoğlu peninsula and also of its potential public spaces. In addition to that, part of Galata district, one of the vital and productive spots of the city was defined as touristic area and again shown as an urban void in the plan.

It is possible to see that the plan was prepared to protect the interests of the investors, as it is lacking any participatory tools and aims only at a specific target. One of the crucial aspects of the plan is that it bases the approval of projects on principles defined by the investors and their architects.

Another model is to open the current urban voids between the building blocks to public use as parks, gardens and parking spaces. This approach would also create a deformation in the existing urban pattern and destroy defining characteristics of Beyoğlu. One of the main features of Beyoğlu is the relationship of the road pattern with natural morphology. The connection of narrow roads by stairways, and their use, contributes to the lifestyle of the area. It is visible in the plan that major alterations are planned for this area, like transforming some stairways to roads. These alterations will change how people interact with their neighbourhood and so inevitably change its character.

The Turkish Privatization Administration opened the Galata Port Project to private investment in 2005. Tendering has been realized after two attempts in 2013 and operating rights given to private investor for 30 years as part of a “build – operate – transfer” model. Different architectural concept projects and programs were designed and declared to the public without any participatory process. It is easy to understand how it approached the design process by looking at one of the project reports; *“the study addressed strategic planning, market analysis, zoning analysis, concept development, program definition and options appraisal for redevelopment of this site. The team also prepared a master plan and urban design strategy which would unlock the development potential of this site.”* (Visionnaire Development Consulting Ltd.). Master planning and urban design issues for such a unique environment should not be the responsibility of an individual architect alone, because, in the absence of a holistic and participatory planning strategy, such projects create their own approach for the city. This willingly preferred top-down strategy is obviously a useful tool for the investors and the government to maximize their income at the cost of losing historic urban identity and only creating a false vision of, and for, the city.



Figure 4: One of the Architectural Proposals for Galataport (Concept Design Proposal of Visionnaire Development Consulting Ltd., London, 2014)

3. The Need for Urban Morphology Analysis

As described in the previous passages, the Beyoğlu peninsula waterfront has become a new frontier for Istanbul, full of opportunities and risks. It is also the new battleground between public and private interests. Urban planning experience has no satisfactory outcome to guide contemporary hopes for the new development of the waterfront as a whole. Partial projects, based on immediate architectural solutions, are being encouraged, to achieve fast and pragmatic implementation, but it is easy to see that they don't come near to responding to public needs and desires.

Within these complex circumstances, the existing urban morphology is the key to be recalled to understanding the facts and the needs for the Beyoğlu peninsula. It is necessary to perceive the area as part of an integrated urban structure and its backbone network. This network cannot only be defined in terms of physical urban components of streets, squares, paths or natural qualifications of hills and waterfronts. Communal desires, flowing through urban paths and corridors transforming these physical structures into a vibrant network are an important component of the system. These horizontal relationships define the culture of Istanbul and create the meaning of place rather than what predefined mega projects try to impose. Deleuze (Sutton; Martin-Jones, 2008) describes such a composition of multiple information sources combined together as in rhizomatic networks. Without the flow of desires in public spaces, physical components become merely theatrical decorations for touristic events. It is clear that the decentralization of existing multilayered functions and creating pseudo environments, without considering the existing networks, cannot meet the needs of this vibrant city centre. As Dowey stated (2005), "The spatial network or field is material condition rather than a discursive or symbolic practice. However, spatial structure has a key linkage to such issues in that it frames and mediates access to certain forms of place experience". In the case of the Beyoğlu peninsula where the heart of the city is located, principally the first design criterion of an architectural project should be to give the answer to the question of how it is to be connected to, and be a part of, the existing urban network.

Therefore, analyzing the urban morphology through mappings and spatial readings are necessary to discover existing flows and desires and to guide the planning process in such a way as to maximise their linkages in further projects.

4. Mappings and Spatial Readings

In the assessment, the basic information collected from the site based on observations used to determine the density of the flows. Term of flow is considered not only as pedestrian movement but also as orientation of social integration places in the urban structure such as culture centres, shops, markets or cafes. Transit vehicle traffic in the observation area is not considered as a mean of flow to be connected to the waterfront and hence excluded from the assessment. Existing maps, plans, reports and project statements used to define the physical morphologic structure of the area. First mapping based on the relation of urban fabric and topography and used as the key to identify the importance of the waterfront in terms of hinterlands. Urban corridors of movements mapped together with density of flows to read the lack of connections.

4.1 Relation of Urban Fabric and Topography

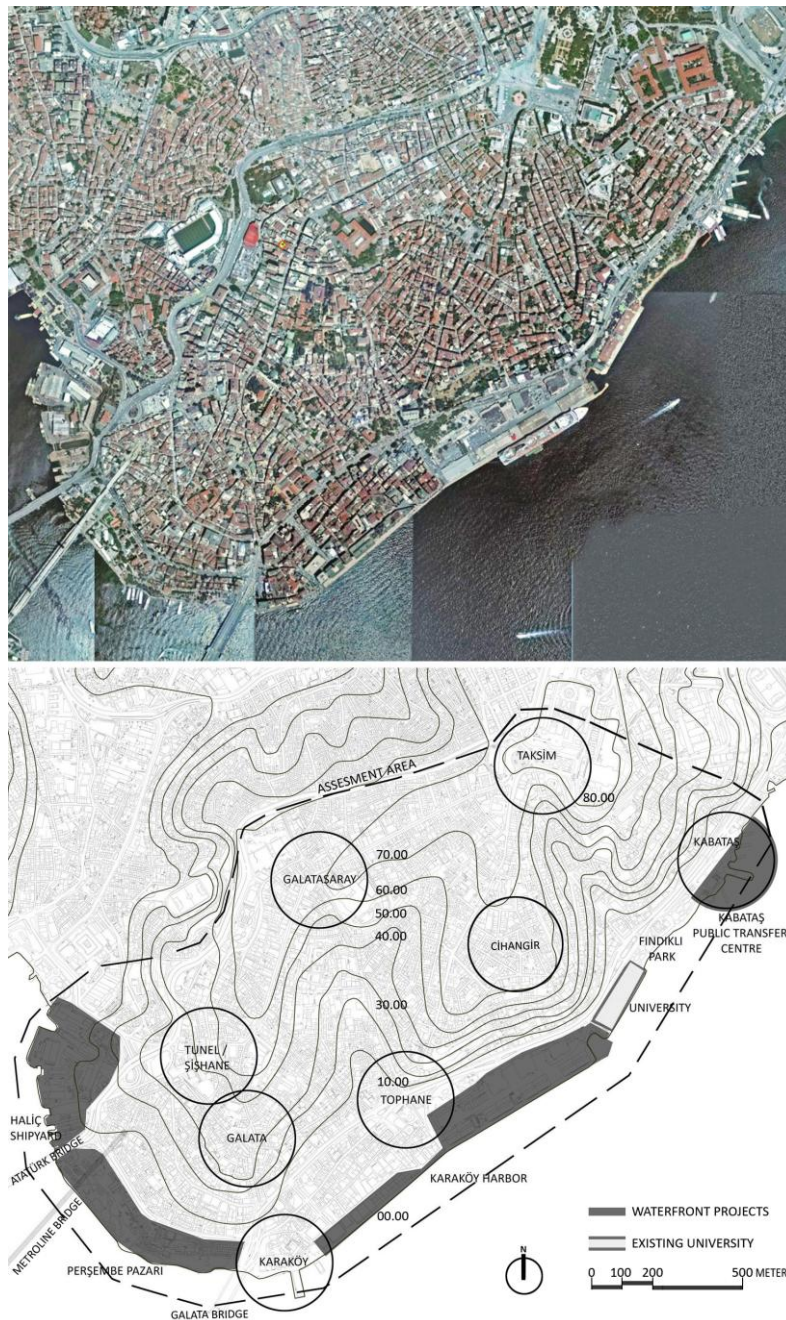


Figure 5: Relation of Urban Fabric and Topography

It is clear to see the diverging urban patterns, lined up at the upper hill between 70 to 50 meters level, throughout the peninsula. Galata – and its old urban pattern of narrow streets, where social interaction is increased - is followed by the Tünel and Şişhane districts. The touch of modernity is visible in Şişhane in the straight lines of 19th century roads and the traffic junction of 1982. Tünel, Galatasary and Taksim districts occupy the plains of the hilltop. Below the hilltop, at 60 to 40 meters, the Cihangir district and housing blocks are located where only neighbourhood characteristics exist. The Tophane area, located at the lower level where the topography is mostly flat, exhibits a mixture of different urban patterns. These opposing characteristics identify the use of public space. In spite of this rich dense urban fabric, there are only two accesses which exist at waterfront to connect with the Bosphorus. They are Karaköy Square and Fındıklı Park. The rest of %78 of the waterfront is not open to public use.

4.2 Existing Urban Flows and Corridors

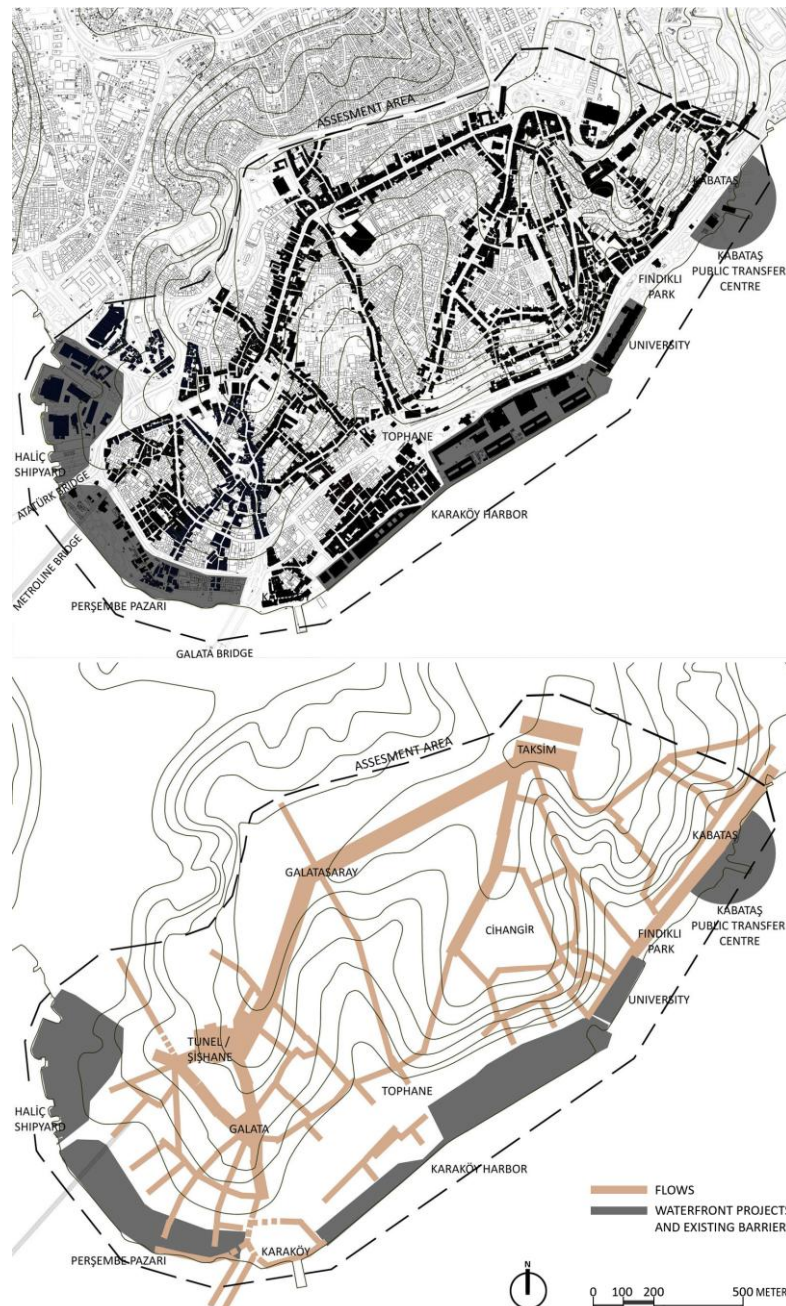


Figure 6: Existing Corridors and Flows

The main pedestrian movement of the assessment area occurs between Taksim and the Tünel Central Business District. The vibrant İstiklâl Street guides the dense flow through Galata where multilayered urban functions define the public space. This flow dissolves in the urban texture and only has a chance to reach the waterfront via Karaköy Square. Activities behind the Karaköy Harbour have a limited connection to attract this flow to the area although potential public space is promising. The Tophane district is the only corridor connecting the centre of İstiklâl Street to the coastline but there is a limited access to the waterfront through the security gate of Modern Art Museum and yet it is not possible to reach the water because of the customs house and the port. Taksim Square has two major connections to waterfront. These are also fading into Tophane and Cihangir neighbourhoods. The only access to the waterfront is the Fındıklı Park. This area is also under the risk of losing its uniqueness because of the planned public transfer centre at Kabataş. It is clear to observe the lack of linkage between the hinterlands and the waterfront.

5. Hinterlands

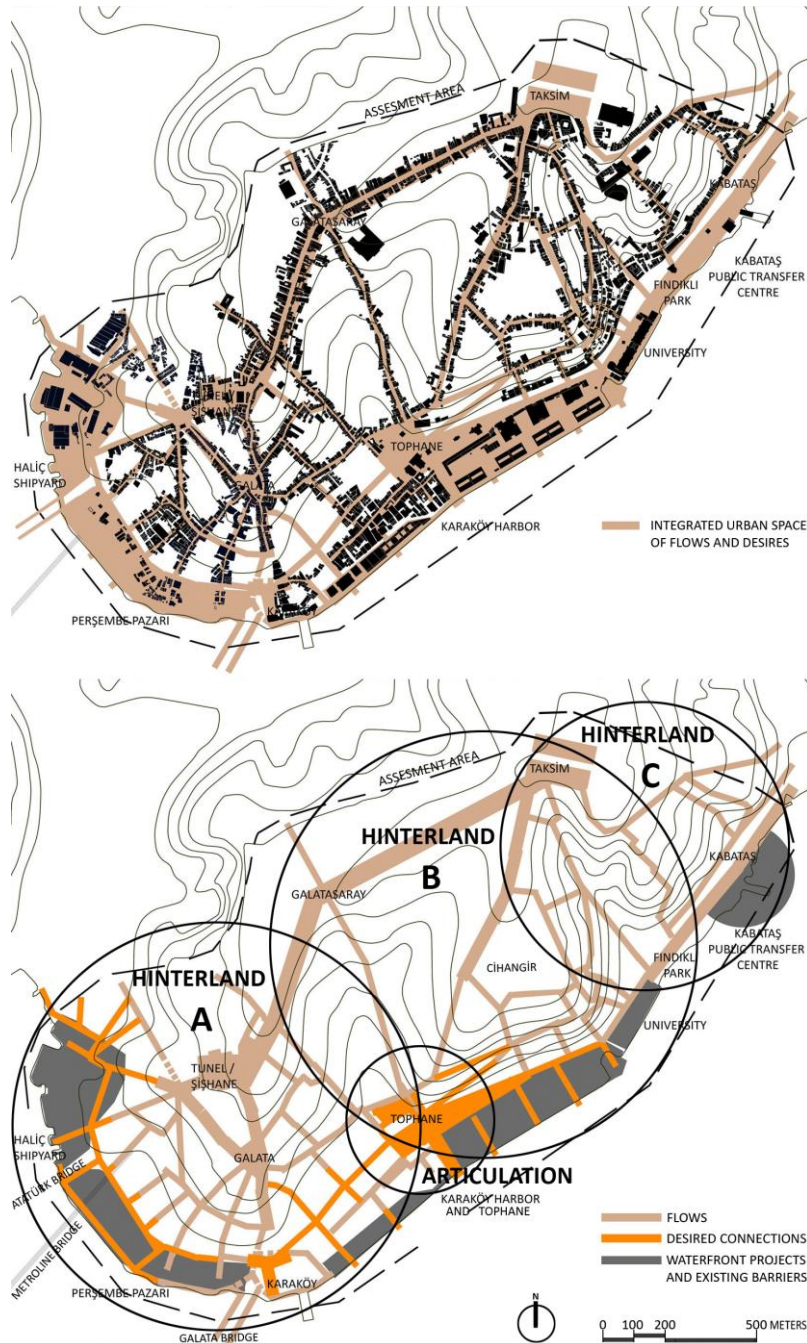


Figure 7: Prospective Linkages, Potential Public Spaces and Hinterlands

According to determined existing urban flows and corridors, it is possible to classify the study area in to three hinterland zones. Each zone relates to the topographic qualifications and the orientation of the Peninsula.

Hinterland A: Şişhane, Tunnel and Galata districts.

Haliç port is along the coast line of the Şişhane district that has no connection to the hillside. This industrial heritage zone is an important potential public space needs to be linked to Şişhane and Kasımpaşa to guide the dense flow of the business district to reach Haliç waterfront. Şişhane Square needs to be redeveloped as a whole with its connections and not only be used as a vista point or a park. This important urban space should be regained as a social hub to distribute the flow from İstiklâl Street and Tunel to Haliç system. Şişhane has individual projects as a Theatre Centre achieved through an architectural design competition but these projects need to be integrated.

There are connections in the urban fabric to connect Galata and Tunnel area to the Persembe Pazarı waterfront. This area is the front line facing historical peninsula. Most of the buildings in Persembe Pazarı were demolished during the urban renewal program between 1984 -1989. As a result of this process, the urban fabric of the waterfront is disintegrated and too weak to carry the flow down to the waterfront but there is enough open space to host the flow of Galata to meet with water. Therefore, the program of Persembe Pazarı should be planned together with Galata District.

Karaköy Square is the main connection with Galata's upper hill via Yüksek Kaldırım Street but this flow ends with a traffic junction. The Bankalar Street coming down from Şişhane also ends in this traffic junction. The square is supposed to link the flow to historical peninsula across the Galata Bridge. Therefore, Karaköy square needs to be redefined as a linkage together Persembe Pazarı, Galata and Karaköy Port. Karaköy Port has the potential of reusable spaces of customhouses and has a strong relation with the urban structure behind the waterfront.

Hinterland B: Galatasaray, Taksim and İstiklal Street

The main corridor of pedestrian movement has the chance to reach the water front through the Tophane District. There are three main pedestrian flows reaching to Tophane area. This area also has a spatial importance to collecting the flow from Galata District. Hence, it is possible to recognize Tophane as a potential articulation zone to guide the flows from all parts of the peninsula. With the support of this articulation Galataport has the chance to connect Galata, Taksim and İstiklal Street.

Hinterland C: Taksim, Cihangir and Gümüşsuyu

Kazancı Yokuşu is one of the dense linkages route connecting Taksim Square to the waterfront. The Cihangir and Gümüşsuyu neighbourhoods use this corridor as the main artery for transportation but also to preserve their privacy and neighbourhood characteristics with inner courtyards and street life. Small streets and stairways connect the neighbourhood settled at the upper hill to the coast. This morphologic characteristic gives a unique identity to the Cihangir area and needs to be re-valuated. Fındıklı Park is the only active park connected to its hinterland at the waterfront. Still, it needs to be redeveloped together with Cihangir and the Taksim area so as to meet the flow from its hinterland. Kabataş is already serving as a transfer area but the spatial limitation is not allowing it to establish itself as a sufficient transfer centre. The risks of landfill bring along with it the changing of the character of the waterfront. This area has to be associated with the Gümüşsuyu, Cihangir and Taksim districts and redeveloped according to local needs.

6. Outcome of the Assessment

-Existing urban voids create barriers between Istanbul's city centre and the waterfront causing lack of connections and flows

-Istanbul's waterfront without spatial or social context of a holistic plan, needed to be understood as part of an existing urban morphology and assessed as a potential public area where city meets the water again.

-It should be taken into consideration that each project area is part of an urban network of physical and social morphology, just as the Beyoğlu peninsula is part of the Haliç Urban Network. The waterfront of the Beyoğlu peninsula needs to be related with its hinterlands and to be planned as a whole. Existing potential links should be utilized in the urban structure to lead the flow to the waterfront and bring with it, the vitality of the city.

- For Istanbulies, reaching the Bosphorus and touching the water not only reflects the desire for public space as envisioned by western culture but also the way of living in and the meaning of being part of, Istanbul. Hence, these potential areas of transformation should not be expected to serve only for touristic activities, hotels and shops or so called public spaces but also for local needs and desires. They are increasingly important as a means to reconnect the city to the water because of their importance for local identity, and thus to the true life of the city.

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