



CITIES IN TRANSFORMATION RESEARCH & DESIGN

Ideas, Methods, Techniques, Tools, Case Studies

edited by Marco Bovati, Michele Caja, Giancarlo Floridi, Martina Landsberger

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VOLUME I

Cities in Transformation Research & Design

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Marco Bovati, Michele Caja

Giancarlo Floridi, Martina Landsberger

scientific supervision

Adalberto Del Bo, Ilaria Valente

VOLUME I

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RESEARCH & DESIGN

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SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISION

ADALBERTO DEL BO, ILARIA VALENTE

EDITORS

MARCO BOVATI, MICHELE CAJA

GIANCARLO FLORIDI, MARTINA LANDSBERGER

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

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Table of Contents

VOLUME ONE

- 23 Foreword
Stefano Francesco Musso
- 25 Urban Transformations: Research and Design
Adalberto Del Bo
- 32 Occupying space and re-ordering place:
Looking forward and backward in 21st century Lahore
Masood A. Khan
- 42 Teaching Architecture. The Troubled School
Daniele Vitale

PART ONE

NEW SCENARIOS OF THE CITY AND DWELLING

- 55 Thinking the City
Martina Landsberger
- I. THEORY AND TOOLS FOR DESIGN
- 61 In Search of a *Modus Operandi* for a Specific Urban Architecture.
A Critical Approach to the Collective Amnesia of Urban Design
Nicolai Bo Andersen
- 69 What is the Role of Architecture in the Contemporary City?
Structure and Form of the Design of the City. The Case of Milan
Pellegrino Bonaretti
- 78 The Transformation of Cities
Emilio Corsaro, Raffaele Mennella
- 85 Redefining Modern Housing Settlements.
The Hypothesis of "Adequate Discontinuity"
Francesco Costanzo
- 92 Somewhere / Nowhere
Carlo Gandolfi
- 100 Landing Areas
Alessandro Isastia

- 109 The Elemental Unit of the City
Raffaella Neri
- 116 Picturesque Tools in the Idea of Modernity. Learning from John Soane
Laura Anna Pezzetti
- 126 Revealing the Urban Plan. The Configurational Analysis
as a Support for the Evaluation of Urban Plans and Projects
Valerio Cutini, Giovanni Rabino
- 133 Places in Transformation.
Designing the Urban Identity Reinterpreting the New Needs
Marichela Sepe
- 142 Do Public Housing Companies Design our Cities like Large Houses
and our Houses like Small Cities?
Karel Vandenhende
2. TYPOLOGY
- 149 Understanding Privacy in Domestic Space:
A Study of Transformation of Urban Houses in the Context of Dhaka
Catherine Daisy Gomes, Farida Nilufar
- 158 The Convivial Housing *Modus* for “Singletown”
Sylvain De Bleeckere, Sebastiaan Gerards
- 166 Transferring Single-family Home Qualities to Multi-family Housing
Amelie Mayer, Ulrike Sturm, Peter Schwehr
- 175 Compose the Siedlung: The Project Of Niddatal (1925-1930)
vs The Project Of Riedberg (1997-2017) in Frankfurt
Manlio Michieletto
- 183 Process Typology and Formative Processes of Middle Eastern Urban Open Spaces
Giulia Annalinda Neglia
- 192 Authentic Communal Housing in America
Marc Roehrle
3. ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY: TOWN AND CITY PROJECTS
- 201 Challenging the Concept of “Informal” in Sub-Saharan African Cities.
The Case of Maxaquene A, Maputo, Mozambique
Jørgen Eskemose Andersen
- 211 Archi-objects of Desire in the Information Age and their Future Role
in City Positioning. Medellin, Colombia as Case Study
Juan Pablo Aschner Rosselli
- 219 Public Space in the Microcosmopolis.
Two New Business Districts of Manchester and Salford
Eamonn Canniffe
- 227 Delirious Tirana
Isotta Cortesi
- 235 Spontaneous Public Space: Resource or *Nonsense*?
Ester Dedé

- 244 Designing in the Historic Centers: Strategies and Tactics
in the Transformation of Collective Open Spaces
Michele Di Santis, Francesco Lenzini, Xianya Xu
- 251 The Grammar of Public Space. Reclamation, Functional Restoration,
Redesign and Urban Reorganisation of Lorenzo Berzieri Square
in Salsomaggiore Terme (Parma)
Emilio Faroldi
- 259 Density. New frontier for Post-soviet Urbanism. Minsk Case Study
Filippo Lambertucci
- 268 Living Utopia - Leaving Utopia. Brussels: Modernist Urban Forms
Evaluated against Pre-Existing Row Houses
Gérald Ledent, Olivier Masson
- 280 Process of Morphological Transformation and the Emerging Pattern
of Built-Form along Gulshan Avenue in Dhaka
Farida Nilufar, Nuzhat Zereen
- 289 Milano: a New Dock on the Site of the Porta Genova Railway Station
Giovanni Cislaghi, Marco Prusicki
- 296 Contemporary Mutations in the Complexity of Bogotá
Claudio Rossi
- 303 The idea of Complementary Uses to the Residential
in the City Growth Strategies
Ana Ruiz
- 310 "Soundscape" and the Identity of the Place.
The Case Study of Kichijoji Station Area, Tokyo
Pega Sanoamuang, Darko Radovic
- 317 Space as a Place for Social Interaction: the Cases of Housing in Bangkok
Sutida Sattayakorn
- 326 Modern Moscow: from City Planning to City Improvement.
Autobiography of the Place
Yuriy Volchok
- 335 A Hope for Athens
Sotirios Zaroulas
4. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES
- 343 A Different Approach: CastelloZINE. Tools and Methodology
of Civil Journalism Applied to the Urban Context
Barbara Cadeddu, Valeria Piazza, Patrizia Sulis
- 351 Mixing Algorithms in Urban Analysis and Transformation
Mike Christenson
- 361 Happiness in the City. Experimental Teaching and Research
in the Methodological Design of the Collective Space of the City
Roberto de Paolis, Marinella Ferrara, Danilo Morigi
- 370 The City as an Organism
Matteo Ieva

- 380 Blocks, Schools and Books
Dirk Janssen, Katrijn Apostel
- 388 Building for Diversity: Residential Areas as a Socio-spatial Context
for Diverse Neighbourhoods
Angelika Juppier, Alex Willener
- 396 Teaching as Research: Vomero, Storkterrein and Other Places
Pasquale Miano, Giorgia Aquilar
- 404 New Urban Conditions: Epistemological and Pedagogical Issues
Andrzej Piotrowski
- 412 Rione Luzzatti in Naples: Conforming Measure of an Intervention
of Urban Redevelopment
Federica Visconti, Renato Capozzi
- 420 Athens in Crisis: Education on the Issue of Emergencies. Beyond Didacticism
Ariadni Vozani

PART TWO
CITIES BETWEEN HISTORY AND FUTURE

- 431 Learning from the Historic City
Michele Caja
- I. RECONSTRUCTION AND URBAN RENEWAL
- 439 Astrakhan: Principles of Reconstruction of Historically-Composed
Development and their Use for Planning of New Central Territories
Oleg I. Adamov
- 448 Potsdam and the Brandenburg Region:
Monumentality as Principle for Urban and Territorial Construction
Ivan Brambilla
- 457 Between Heritage Conservation and Urban Renewal.
A Case Study: Paris, from Haussmann to the Present Day
Alessio Cardaci, Antonella Versaci
- 465 Reconstructing the Cambel's Yali at Bosphorus
Francesco Collotti, Serena Acciai
- 472 The Fluidity of Scale and Time in Jože Plečnik's Ljubljana
Jennifer Gaugler
- 479 The Paddington Terrace House: An Example of Incrementally
Accommodating Change from the House to the City
Corey T. Griffin
- 488 Recomposition's Paradoxes. A Research Case Study on a Concert-hall in Ferrara
Alessandro Massarente
- 498 Munich, Urban Development: Model and Form of the Modern City
Nicola Panzini
- 506 Urban Renewal in the Late Nineteenth Century. The Case of Via Dante in Milan
Pierfrancesco Sacerdoti

- 515 Duisburg 1945: *Stunde Null?*
Benedetta Stoppioni
- 522 Westernization Effects on the Planning and Architectural Approaches
in Historic Commercial Center of Kadikoy between Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries
Ege Uluca Tumer
2. HERITAGE, CONSERVATION AND TRANSFORMATION
- 531 The Archaeology of Urban Change: 19th Century Jaffa
Yoav Arbel
- 539 Libya of the Post-war Reconstruction. Recreation of a Tradition:
the Jebal Nafousah and the Routes to Ghadames between the Artisan
and Touristic Economy
Paola Cofano
- 548 Dealing with Change in the World Heritage Site of Old Rauma
M. Anca Dumitrescu
- 557 Archaeology and Architectural Design: Projects for Alexandria (Egypt)
and Alexandria in Aria-Herat (Afghanistan)
Luisa Ferro
- 566 Managing Transformations in Historic Urban Cores between Conserving
and Developing. A Case Study
Mariacristina Giambruno, Raffaella Simonelli
- 575 The Medina of Tripoli, Libya. The Future of an Urban Living Heritage
and Cultural Landscape
Ludovico Micara
- 584 Working Techniques and Restoration Methods
for Plaster Decorations on Façades in New and Old Design
Søren Vadstrup
3. REPRESENTATION AND URBAN IMAGE
- 591 The GIS *Forma Urbis Romae* Project: Creating a Layered History of Rome
Allan Ceen, James Tice
- 600 Perspective, Visual Perception and Urban Planning
Sylvie Duvernoy
- 608 Imperatives of Craft: Making in Beginning Design as it Prefigures Urban Response
James Eckler, Karl Wallick
- 617 Mapping the Spatial Identity of a Location Relying on Methods
from Visual Art
Yvonne Knevels, Oswald Devisch
- 625 Culture as a Determinant of City Form.
The Case of the Former Jewish District in Lodz
Małgorzata Hanzl
- 635 Reviewing Design References with Diagrams
Guilherme Lassance

4. CRITICAL REVISION, MEMORY, IDENTITY

- 645 Industrialisation of the Building of Post-War Residential Estates in Milan. Specific Features, Issues, Strategies for Conservation
Francesca Albani
- 654 Planning in the Gray Zone, Challenges and Opportunities: The Case of Independent Zoning Plans in East Jerusalem (work in progress)
Michal Braier
- 662 Forgotten Project: Plan de la Ribera, 1964-1972, Barcelona
Nadia Fava
- 671 The Antimodernist Polemic as Rhetorical Construct: Prince Charles and “populist realism”
Federico Ferrari
- 680 New Models for the Foundation Cities in Puglia and Basilicata
Graziella Fittipaldi, Francesco Scricco
- 689 Memory, Values and Destiny of Twentieth Century Inheritance
Giovanna Franco
- 697 Architecture. Essay On The City
Gaetano Fusco
- 707 Chinese Architectural Education in the Rapid Economic Development
Han Linfei
- 713 From Alberti to Team 10: Towards a Welfare Humanism
Nelson Mota, Gonçalo Canto Moniz, Mário Krüger
- 722 Managing Memory in City. Case-study of Complex of the Federal Secretariat for National Defense (Generalstab Building)
Milica Muminović, Vladimir Parežanin, Darko Radović
- 730 The Contemporary City in a Deceiving Search of Identity
Roberto Recalcati
- 738 Evolution of Moscow Housing Development
Stanislav A. Sadovsky
- 744 Identity and Transformation. The Designing of the Historical Urban Landscape
Fabrizio Toppetti

VOLUME TWO

- 773 Regaining Lost Time: Design and Architectural,
Urban and Environmental Resources
Ilaria Valente
- 781 City's Architecture and Research by Design
Ferran Sagarra Trias
- 788 Italian Architecture of the Twentieth Century. Issues and problems
Franco Purini

PART THREE STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 797 Sustainability Strategies (for Cities in Transformation)
Marco Bovati

1. SUSTAINABLE URBAN AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

- 811 Khedivial Cairo: An Evolved Metabolism
Eman M. Abdel Sabour, Stephen Luoni
- 819 Setting Priorities: Sustainability, Environmental Health,
and Embedded Value Judgments for the Urban Design Process
Anirban Adhya, Philip D. Plowright
- 828 A Morpho-energetic Optimization Tool for a Low Energy
and Density Reasoned City Area
Laëtitia Arantes, Olivier Baverel, Daniel Quenard
- 836 Urban Acupuncture: Improving the Public Space between
the Socialist Block of Flats and the Old City in Bucharest
Cosmin Caciuc
- 844 Transformation of Urban Landscapes
Antonia M.A. Chiesa
- 852 How Environmental and Energy Issues Shape the Cities:
A Case-Study in Barcelona, Spain
Giovanni Marco Chiri, Helena Coch Roura, Alessandra Curreli, Ilaria Giovagnorio
- 861 An Integrated Approach to Urban Transformation
for Polycentric Development of Settlement Areas
Calogero Montalbano
- 871 Concept - Ecological City
Maxim Poleschuk

2. ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN REGENERATION

- 879 Territories of Energy and Urban Shape
Pepe Barbieri, Alberto Ulisse
- 887 Strategies for the Regeneration of Suburban Sprawl. Case Studies in Rome
Alessandra De Cesaris

- 895 Sustainable Façade Technologies: High-rise Building Retrofitting
Kyoung-Hee Kim
- 903 Living the Compact City: the Case of San Salvario in Turin
Silvia Malcovati, Stefano Suriano
- 912 The Regeneration of Public Housing Neighbourhoods.
The Example of Tor Bella Monaca in Rome
Domizia Mandolesi
- 921 Regenerating Public Residential Areas in the Modern City
Carlo Alessandro Manzo
- 929 Reinhabiting, the House, the Street and the City
Magda Mària, Pere Fuertes, Roger-Joan Sauquet, Anna Puigjaner
- 937 Continuity of Urban Culture.
Challenges and Opportunities Facing Urban Conservation
Valeria Pracchi, Heba Elsayed
- 945 Chinese Puzzle: A Tangle of Space in Shanghai's *Shikumen* Architecture
Peter Wong
3. ECOLOGICAL LIVING: FORMS, TYPOLOGIES, TECHNIQUES
- 953 Domestic Green Spaces in Contemporary Cities
Elisa Bernardi
- 961 Methodology for the Implementation of Solar Strategies in Architecture
Doris Ehrbar, Ulrike Sturm, Peter Schwehr
- 970 Groundscrapers. Vitalizing the Tradition
of the Urban Low Rise, Mixed Hybrid Building
Susanne Komossa, Nicola Marzot, Roberto Cavallo
- 979 Unité 2.0: Housing in Time of Austerity
Luca Lanini
- 987 Urban Transformation, Energy Consumption and CO₂ Emission
Monica Lavagna, Paco Melià, Paolo Pileri, Viktoriya Sendyureva
- 995 Sober, Sustainable and Urban: Recent Housing Experiences
Marco Lucchini
- 1003 The Rational Maintenance of Social Housing (with a Warlike Modesty)
Marina Montuori, Barbara Angi, Massimiliano Botti, Olivia Longo
- 1011 Building Products Made from Recovered Paper and Cardboard:
Applicability and First Conclusions
Rossana Paparella
- 1019 Solar Control in the Architectural Composition
Stefano Perego
- 1026 Vegetation, Architecture and Sustainability
Katia Perini
- 1034 The Sufficient House: Housing Design for Suburban Bangkok
Based on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy
Saithiwa Ramasoot

- 1044 Plants: a Model for Design? Plant Plasticity, Mutation and Adaptability: Qualities Open to Interpretation
Patricia Ribault, Sara Lubtchansky, Patrick Nadeau
- 1052 Form of the Settlement, Energy and Housing Typologies. Contemporary Research and Education in Architecture
Francesca Scotti
- 1059 Advocating for Agility, Adaptability + Appropriateness: Innovations + Inspirations for an Environmental Design of the 21st Century
Brian R. Sinclair, Somayeh Mousazadeh, Ghazaleh Safarzadeh
4. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES: EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY
- 1069 The Adaptive City
John Brennan
- 1078 Education for Sustainable Architecture: Professional Competencies and Responsible Ethics
Bing Chen
- 1087 To a “Integrated Multiscale Project” Design Method. Transecting Sections and Action Contracts
Roberta Ingaramo, Angioletta Voghera
- 1096 Performance and Form: New Pedagogical Approaches to Designing the Building Envelope as an Adaptive Interface
Ulrike Passe, Robert Demel

PART FOUR
INFRA STRUCTURES, LAND AND LANDSCAPE

- 1109 Structures of Picturesque
Giancarlo Floridi
1. LAND AND URBAN SHAPE
- 1117 Schools as Catalysts for the Urban Environment
Ulrike Altenmüller-Lewis
- 1127 Residential metropolization process and new forms of urban centralities
Priscilla Ananian
- 1135 Stand-By Landscapes: Designing Residual Spaces for Urban Regeneration. “Small Green Ring” Landscape Promenade: An Experimental Case Study on Milano Navigli Areas
Anna Arioli
- 1145 Historical Evolution of Urban Segregation: Mechanisms of Differentiation Through Space and Time
Nadia Charalambous
- 1155 The Border as a Place of Experience
Andrea di Franco
- 1163 Examining Material Flows for the Study of a Settlement. A Historical Perspective
Leila Marie Farah

- 1171 Squares and Streets without Town.
Settlement Patterns in Puglia's Landscape: the Borgo Segezia
Anna Bruna Menghini
- 1180 Learning from Ksour. The Valleys of the Drâa and the Ziz in pre-Saharan Morocco
Carlo Moccia
- 1187 The Waterfront Project for the Historic Centres:
The Case of the Redevelopment of the Historic Port of Cala di Palermo
Sebastiano Provenzano, Giuseppe Pellitteri
- 1195 Cities of Salt. Toward a New Analysis Method for a New Planning Strategy
Giuseppe Rociola
- 1202 Activating Emptiness: Bricolage of Japanese urban context
Marja Sarvimäki
- 1209 Notes for a Design for the 900 km Nile City
Pier Paolo Tamburelli
- 1216 Copenhagen - Øresund - Malmö: city borders and construction of the landscape
Carlotta Torricelli
- 1225 The Carbon-neutral Settlement of Broeset.
Towards a new paradigm in urban planning?
Dag Kittang
2. *INFRA* STRUCTURES
- 1235 The Next Generative Infrastructure for Detroit
Constance C. Bodurow
- 1248 Urban Mobility Footprints
Fabio Casiroli
- 1256 Regional Infrastructures
Sara Queen
- 1265 Landscape as Infrastructure: Ideas for Urban transformation
of Placa de les Glories as a New Public Node for Barcelona, Spain
Arunjyoti Hazarika
- 1273 New Element of Settling (NER) as Search of Future City
Ilija G. Lezhava
- 1283 Knowledge and Design for Assembled Urban Landscapes
Rejana Lucci
- 1290 Integration between Infrastructural Design and Territorial Planning.
Case Study of the Third Policy Document *Shaping the Netherlands.*
Architectural Policy 2001-2004
Stefano Sabatino
- 1298 Infrastructure and the Just City
Maurizio Sabini
- 1306 Identity and Landscape along the Way from Jaffa to Jerusalem
Alessandra Terenzi

- 1317 Railway Station between Architecture and City.
Western Models, Chinese Cases and Urban Transformation
Zhen Chen

3. TERRITORY AND FORM

- 1327 Inventory, Assessment and Evaluation of Historic Resources
in HemisFair Park for the New Master Plan
William Dupont, Sedef Doganer, Saadet Beeson, Adriana Munoz, Laura Carrera
- 1336 Defining the Metropolitan Central Park, a Special Item
in the Contemporary Open-Space-System
Joan Florit Femenias
- 1344 Growing Cities, Growing Roofs: Vegetative Systems' Response to Urban Runoff
Elizabeth J. Grant, Shouib Ma'bdeh
- 1352 War Ruins, Peace Landscapes, Metropolitan Nomadism.
["Natura Artificialis" and Urban Mobility | Olympiapark-München]
Andreina Maahsen-Milan
- 1360 Instrumental Restitching and Perceptual Rotation:
Spatial Recalibration Strategies for Monumental Parks in Historic Cities
Deborah A. Middleton
- 1370 Landscapes of Survival: the OASIS System
in the Contemporary Mediterranean City
Veronica Salomone
- 1378 Philadelphia Green Structures
Kate Wingert-Playdon

4. METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

- 1385 Cybertown: Another Façade of the Postindustrial City
Leonard R. Bachman
- 1394 Retooling Architectural Pedagogy: Community-based Design in Haiti
Jim Lutz, John Comazzi
- 1403 Ma.Chi.Na.
Alessandra Como
- 1411 Archetypes in-formation. Strategies of Transition in Architecture
and Urban Design
Yannis Zavoleas, Panayotis Tournikiotis

Reconstructing the Cambel's Yali at Bosphorus

Francesco Collotti, Serena Acciai
Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy

Foreword. Istanbul and Sedad Hakki Eldem, the Past as Building Material

“Istanbul, the city where geography provokes history”, wrote Brodskij.

“Town that is built up upon herself “and that lives as she always has lived, not by substitution but by addition”. Town where the ancient is truly a source of design, “whose karma is in being a crossroads of civilization”, that Bridge that Pamuk too sees in his Istanbul¹.

In this port which is in reality a mosaic of ports, in this city made up of many cities that in the end are only one, there exist characteristics which distinguish the architecture: above all the constant presence of water, even as a horizon which runs through the constructed fabric, and then the legacy of the ancient city, that is the erosion of classicism as a principle of architecture.

Sedad Hakki Eldem, architect of Istanbul, who worked *for and with* Istanbul for all his long life, realized in the metropolis on the Bosphorus his greatest architecture. Fragments of constructed city which are integrated as contributions of Modern into that genealogy of architectures that lead to the evolution of the city in time.

This research, and the here presented pilot-project, have their starting point in the PhD Research developed in our Doctorate School by Serena Acciai, focusing the case history of Sedad Hakki Eldem, architect of the Turkish Modern².

Aristocratic architect, descendent of a wealthy Ottoman family, Eldem was educated between Munich and the Academy of Fine Arts of Istanbul and early in his career began to design the great architecture of the city, beginning with the Topkapı Palace. Eldem read his city as an Ottoman but also and above all through the surveys, drawings, and engravings of Western scholars³.

Particularly important are Müller-Wiener, German archeologist who discovers by surveying all of Sultanahmet, thus bringing the past to life⁴, and I. Melling, German architect who in the 19th century arrived in Istanbul for a brief stay and remained eighteen years to sketch views of the Bosphorus.

Melling worked as Imperial Architect, not only engraving many detailed drawings of the Sultan's palaces, Ottoman society, and representing some views

¹ O. Pamuk, *Istanbul*. Torino: Einaudi, 2008.

² S. Acciai, *Byzance - Constantinople - Istanbul: per Frammenti di Generose Idee. The Case Study of Sedad Hakki Eldem* (Doctorate School in Architecture, design and history of the Arts at the University of Florence), results partially published in S. Acciai, “Ultima fermata Costantinopoli / Last stop Constantinople”. *Firenze - architettura*, 1/2011, 136-143.

³ E. Eldem, B. Tanju, U. Tanyeli, *Sedad Hakki Eldem, I: Early Years*. Istanbul: Garanti, 2008; Id., *Sedad Hakki Eldem, II: Retrospektif*. Istanbul: Garanti, 2009; S. Bozdoğan, *Sedad Eldem: Architect in Turkey*. Singapora: Concept Media, 1987.

⁴ W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul*. Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1977.

Constantinople and its environs, but also the architect who was committed to build pavillions, furniture and palaces on the Bosphorus shores for the Sultan's sister.

On the surveys plans of the archaeologists Sedad Hakki Eldem traces his proposals or Istanbul.

Following the Melling's engravings Eldem starts his research/survey/project of the Bosphorus' shores⁵.

Eldem was intimately involved in the architectural and urban experience of the city and her memory. He worked for Istanbul through those elements which Aldo Rossi defined constitutive of the architecture of a city – *monuments and houses* – and today his works remain scattered throughout the city as exemplifications of the image of the epoch and society which Eldem wanted in a way to capture and make available to the masses.

The Experience of Ottoman House

Starting from the experience of Istanbul and extending the research to a human settlement at geographic scale, Eldem wrote about the Byzantine influence and wondered what contaminations and suggestions the Ottomans might have found before becoming Turks, seeking and investigating as always the typology of the Turkish House.

The Ottoman town is by him described as *fragments of imaginations*.

You could catch glimpses of the houses over their high garden walls, and discovering views of a courtyard through open gates. The inhabitants of these houses would generally ask you in, and show you highly-decorated rooms, or take you to sofa-halls, laid with solid beams scrubbed white as ivory over generations.⁶

Eldem continually wonders about the work on the building type of the Turkish House. TURKISH HOUSE? A "Western construction"? An open question... as is the nature of the term "Turkish" employed by the Europeans to indicate the cultural and religious ethnicities of the heterogeneous population of the Ottoman Empire.

The typical Ottoman house has specific characteristics that give it its peculiar place in the universal history of home types. Its origins and its relationship to the house types of the neighboring areas make a fascinating case study for the understanding both of the cultural phenomena of the Ottoman universe and of the processes involved in making architecture in general, Ottoman or not.⁷

The experience of architecture oscillates constantly between the generality of type and the specificity of site. We have to critic the concept of *context* and

⁵ S.H. Eldem, *Istanbul Anilari (Reminiscences of Istanbul)*. Istanbul: Istanbul Alarko Egitim Tesisleri, 1979.

⁶ S.H. Eldem, *Türk Evi Plan Tipleri*. Istanbul: Istanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, 1954; Id., *Türk Evi, Osmanlı Dönemi, Turkish Houses Ottoman Period I, II, III*. Istanbul: Taç Vakfı yayını 1984-1986-1987.

⁷ M.M. Cerasi, "The formation of Ottoman house types: a comparative study in interaction with neighboring cultures". In *Muqarnas XV: An Annual on the visual culture of the Islamic world*, ed. Gülru Necipoglu. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998.

mannered environmentalism. The traits of type and the constituents of the site should remain inseparable. Composed, in other words re-composed.

According to Maurice Cerasi the open question is that

the Ottoman house was a syncretic product of a multiethnic society from the seventeenth century onwards, with the imperial court acting as a powerful catalyst [...] the relationship of house type to urban structure and urban culture is obviously very important in Ottoman towns no less than in other cultures.⁸

The Ottoman house: a border wall defining a garden, the wall is so sized and shaped to resist against earthquake, the timber structure of the house, fragile and flexible at the same time, covers only a part of the garden: a light wooden-frame construction with brick or earth infill is set on the stone walls.

“The houses seemed to be set on retaining walls or on the ground, any sense of permanency was rare”: this is a concept of settlement connected to “the institutional and psychological context of Ottoman society”⁹.

A garden courtyard (more garden than courtyard) is the center of the family life.

“Organization and volume composition resembled the Far Eastern pavilion systems”.

Functional spaces are at the ground floor level or in outbuildings in the garden.

The upper floor is a cluster of square or rectangular rooms/oda, unmarked by functional specialization but defined by elements such sequence of windows, niches and walled cupboards, fireplace, symmetrical ceiling decoration with central focal point, perimeter seating.

The ottoman house is what in french language is called *savoir vivre*.

First of all it is a way of life, is a lifestyle, is a way for pleasant life.

The Yalı Architecture between East and West

In the general and long-lasting experience of Istanbul as Byzantine and – later – Ottoman town, the human settlement and the creation of a landscape along the shores of the Bosphorus is a unique and extraordinary artifact.

The yalı architecture (system of building and sequence of gardens, walls and terraces) is at the same time type and site specific principle of settlement on the Bosphorus. The recent chaotic development of the channel shores is forgetting the ancient principles which ruled for centuries the Istanbul’s extension eastwards, creating a pleasure’s and representative space’s system (palaces, mansions, gardens, terraces) integrated to the pre-existing small villages.

The yalı architecture in the Bosphorus is a settlement’s principle, continuing, organizing and in work setting an original greek byzantine landscape marked by small objects, water streaming downhill, systems of terraces probably erected by peasants.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

The yalı architecture, figure between Ottoman tradition and European architecture is a particular experience in the controversial westernization of Istanbul.

The history of settlement along the shores of the Bosphorus in the Ottoman period is rather exceptional in comparison with standard aspects of Ottoman urban culture. In the major centers of the Empire, the residential fabric was organized in rather introverted districts or mahalles, with limited architectural display of social status. Instead, the topography of the Bosphorus would be exploited by local and foreign elites of the eighteenth century to construct a veritable showcase of social representation and urban rituals, generating something comparable to a broad boulevard in a baroque European city.¹⁰

The huge work on the yalis proposed by Sedat Hakki Eldem consists not only in built examples but also in few important contributions of scientific literature, where he involves his student's classes in reconstructing the often lost landscape of the Bosphorus.

Sedat Hakki Eldem investigates the origins and the characteristics of the ancient and old buildings which might be read/reread in a modern light. Do the great buildings of the past remain in Istanbul as sorts of footprints in the successive design of the city? Does that manner of constructing the waterfront, the Emperors' Palaces, remain in the history of the identity of the buildings on the Bosphorus?

It is certain that with his endeavors (the systematic classification of the architecture of the Bosphorus and the establishment of survey and design seminars for students of the Academy of Fine Arts of Istanbul, among others)¹¹ and with his designs for the new yalı on the Bosphorus, Eldem contributed in a decisive manner to the memory and the acknowledgement of the highly particular value of this architectural heritage.

In fact it is not a coincidence that the first representations of Turkish houses in European publications coincide with the blossoming of exoticism and the discovery of the different as a central point in the self-definition of the Enlightenment, and it was precisely the publication of the work of travelers and artists such as Allow and Bartlett and the already above mentioned Melling that dictated the first panoramic views of the yalı, those grand wood dwellings along the Bosphorus.

That Eldem took as an initial source of inspiration for his work a copy of the *Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore* of Melling indicates the importance of Western representations in the formation of the concept of the Turkish House and the importance of intertextual references.

¹⁰ P. Girardelli, *Landscape in context. Urban and rural dimension of a coastal estate on the Bosphorus*, lecture at 14th Annual Mediterranean Studies Congress (Ionian University, Corfu, Greece, 25-28 May 2011).

¹¹ S.H. Eldem, *Le yalı de Koçoğlu a Bebek sur le Bosphore*. Istanbul: Vehbi Koc Vakfi, 1975; Id., *The yalis of the Bosphorus - Anatolian side*. Istanbul: Vehbi Koc Vakfi, 1993; Id., *The yalis of the Bosphorus - European side*. Istanbul: Vehbi Koc Vakfi, 1993.

It all begins with the Amcazâde Hüseyin Yalısı, structure dating to 1689 which can be defined the archetype of this building¹². The building which can now be seen on the Bosphorus, near Anadoluhisarı, is only a fragment of the original and elaborate plan of the summer estate of the Köprülü family, organized according to the usual disposition in *selamik* and *haremlık*, here however placed far apart from one another.

All that remains of this constellation of architectural elements is the building with a central plan which rotates about a fire while all around the *divanhane*, a great room made up of low seats placed under the windows that repeatedly open onto the sea, unfolds.

“All comes from the Orient” wrote Luciano Semerani [“and the sensual, magic, and illusionary essence of ancient architecture is hidden”]¹³, but in this building on the Bosphorus all is still manifest; in fact it remains throughout the centuries as an incunabulum of Ottoman architectural art. From the archetype to the realization of a modern interpretation of these residences on the Bosphorus – Eldem in the 60s finds himself with the opportunity to design new *yalı* on the Bosphorus for that new, illuminated clientele, industrialists and businessmen who were the natural evolution of the Ottoman elite and who had renewed the practice of the dwellings on the water, that manner of living on the water’s edge treating the Bosphorus almost as a “theater of life”, comparable in this to the Grand Canal of Venice.

Although these commissions engaged Eldem for individual buildings, at a certain point their number became so great that the context could no longer be confined to the site of each *yalı*; it inevitably became a more choral question, or rather the image of the skyline of the Bosphorus through a reconstruction of fragments of the two banks wherein the *yalı* were the principal element.

The Case History of Yalı Cambel

In the main stream of researches supported by the Department of History of the BU Bogaziçi University (Özyar, Girardelli), the Department of Architecture *drawing/survey history design of the University of Florence* (Collotti with Acciai) is developing the pilot project for the refurbishment of the garden at Halet in Arnavtkoi, on the European side of the Bosphorus.

The most striking feature of the Cambel *yalı* is that it develops the original type of coastal settlement in its ambivalent, urban and rural dimension.

On the top, strawberry fields of the typical Bosphorus sort *cilek*.

For similar estates, access to the shore was essential for both infrastructural and prestige reasons. Equally important was the inclusion in the property of a large portion of land, to be exploited for both social and productive, agricultural purposes.¹⁴

Part of the reasearch is the survey of the garden, of the walls’s sequence and trying hypothesis about the water’s system flushing downhill. As in the

¹² S. Unver, S.H. Eldem, *Amcazâde Hüseyin Pasa Yalısı*. Istanbul, 1970.

¹³ L. Semerani, ed., *La casa. Forma e ragioni dell’abitare*. Milano: Skira, 2008.

¹⁴ P. Girardelli, *Landscape in context*, cit.



1. S. Acciai, Sketch of the elevation in gold
2. Cambel's yali at Arnavtkoi, beginning of XX century (source DAI Istanbul)
3. F. Collotti, S. Acciai, Survey / interpretation, 2011

byzantine tradition a water reservoir was provided on the top of the property, maybe connected with a water-vaine streaming on the flanks of the Bosporus topography.

First of all we needed trimming the overgrown small plants and cutting not autochthone trees.

Focus of the project is the compatible reuse of this place as studies center of the Boğaziçi University, refurbishing the sequence of terraces as *mesire* (collective garden surrounded by walls).

Conservation of the heritage by means of the project: construction is, according to us, not far from re-construction.

Conservation, maintenance and the compatible reuse of the living heritage and of the cultural landscape is the mission, therefore this project consists in:

- rediscovering the way of the water;
- conservation and restoration of the terraces;
- maintenance of the complex system of retaining walls and draining net;
- disveiling the original topography as spectacular *point de vue* toward the surrounding landscape;
- re-construction of the underground system of baths and spaces, especially of the *serdab* the Persian declination of the Turkish bath;
- replanting of the original autochthone trees.

In this way we are re-discovering this garden maybe once belonging to the Sultan's gardener.

And all this learning from the past used as building material

- according to the nature, never against;
- listening to the topography;
- seeking the way of the water.