

La città che si rinnova

Dal manufatto architettonico alla forma urbana

a cura di

Chiara Ingrosso, Elena Manzo,
Luca Molinari, Riccardo Serraglio



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*Bringing the Two Sides Together! **

Haluk Gerçek interviewed by Pelin Derviş

Pelin Derviş: This interview is about transport between the various ‘sides’ of Istanbul. We will concentrate particularly on the European and Anatolian shores, separated by the Bosphorus Strait, and, at the entrance to the Strait, the Golden Horn, which divides Beyoğlu from the Historic Peninsula. But it may be good to first give the reader an idea of Istanbul’s transport environment. If you like, we can begin by describing patterns of transport in the city. Statistics will be helpful in grasping the effects that transport has on daily life.

Haluk Gerçek: If you are coming to Istanbul for the first time and you are not one of the lucky travellers who arrive by a cruise ship, the first thing that will surprise you will be the teeming masses one normally sees only in the airports of megalopolises. Once you make your way through the crowd, find yourself a vehicle and set off towards the city, you may be terrified by the chaotic, almost lawless behaviour you see on the roads. Unfortunately, transport and traffic problems, which head the list of factors that most negatively affect the quality of life in Istanbul, have become a sign of the city’s identity. The first thing that comes to mind when Istanbul is mentioned is its traffic, characterized as ‘a disaster’. According to some international traffic congestion indicators, Istanbul has for years been among the top three in lists of world cities with the worst traffic. Istanbulites spend at least one and a half to two hours a day stuck in traffic. Those who must travel over the Bosphorus bridges may spend twice as much time. One can organize a very long list of the reasons for the traffic and transport problems in Istanbul under a few main headings (transport policy, decision-making process and governance, urban growth, city and transport planning, infrastructure, problems of administration and supervision, etc.), and it can be said that there is a general consensus on this subject. But in my opinion the fundamental reason is the swift growth of the city, due to internal migration, without sound

urbanization planning. Istanbul, until the beginning of the 1960s simply a coastal city, has gradually become an 'endless' megalopolis. Among the main reasons for the chaotic traffic may be mentioned the manifold increase in the number of motor vehicles and cars that accompanied the rapid urban sprawl, the lack of a widespread metro network and an inadequate mass transit system. During the past twenty years, while the population of Istanbul has increased by nearly 70 per cent, the number of motor vehicles in the city has multiplied 3.3 times. Despite significant recent investments, the length of the rail system network in this 14-million megalopolis is only 141.5 kilometres. While Istanbul was the second city in the world, after London, to have a metro line, a century later its metro system struggles to achieve the levels of cities such as London, Paris and Moscow.

For every 1,000 people in Istanbul there are 157 cars, a number that is quite low in comparison with many developed western cities. Within ten years, 65 per cent of households in Istanbul are expected to own cars. Despite the rapid rise in car ownership, the share of cars and taxis in daily motorized trips has remained almost the same (30 per cent) since the early 1990s. Seventy per cent of daily motorized trips, including vehicles taking people to work and school, are made by the public transport system. Thanks to the new lines completed in recent years, the percentage of people using the rail system has risen from 4.6 per cent in 2006 to 11.3 per cent in 2013. With new rail system projects now in progress, the city administration plans to raise this figure to 25 per cent by 2023.

Istanbul is a seaside city located on one of the most beautiful sites on Earth, between the Marmara and the Black Seas, and situated around the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. But it cannot be said that Istanbul adequately exploits the opportunities that the waterways offer for transport. The share of ferries in daily journeys over the past twenty-five years has remained at a level of 2 to 3 per cent. Only one in five of those travelling between the two sides of the Bosphorus use ferries. We will touch on the reasons for this later.

Pelin Derviş: Would you briefly describe the transport policies and their effect on the life of the city? I think it will be useful for



1. Istanbul, *Sahilbent*, daily shipping traffic along the Bosphorus. Video/photo collage from the *Port City Talks, Istanbul – Antwerp* exhibition at MAS, Antwerp by E. Dörter (2015)



2. Istanbul, view towards Golden Horn, Karaköy-Galata Bridge-Eminönü (2015) [photo by E. Dörter]



3. Istanbul, vehicle ferry (2015) [photo by H. Gerçek]

understanding the general picture if you speak about the question of to what degree transport policies and other scenarios regarding the city (to do with urban development) are treated as a whole. What will the third bridge, the growth of the city to the north and the Kanal İstanbul project bring to Istanbul? What will they take away?

Haluk Gerçek: In the past ten to fifteen years very large investments have been made in transport infrastructure: metro and tram lines, the metrobus system (in some countries it is known as BRT: bus rapid transit), tunnels, roads and junctions were built, and environmental and master transport plans were produced. Some large-scale transport projects are underway, such as the car tunnel under the Bosphorus (Eurasia Tunnel), the Third Bosphorus Bridge, the Northern Marmara Motorway and the Third Airport. We see that these mega-projects, which will irreversibly change the future macroform of the city, were not articulated with a comprehensive plan prepared according to rational, coherent urban development and transport policies. Rather, they were prepared in a hurry according to the ‘vision’ of the country’s leaders, who made top-down decisions, with a ‘we know what is best for the city’ attitude.

The most basic guide to the planning that determines the future spatial development of Istanbul is the 1/1,000,000 Scale Environmental Plan for Province of Istanbul prepared by the Greater Istanbul Municipality and approved in 2009. The plan included fundamental decisions on land-use and transport, and served as the foundational law governing other subscale plans. But large-scale projects like the Third Bosphorus Bridge and the Eurasia Tunnel mentioned above were not foreseen in this plan; the Third Airport whose construction is underway in the north of Istanbul was planned in Silivri, at the western edge of the city.

Transport projects have always been one of the most important factors shaping the urban macroform. When one observes the developments following especially the building of the Bosphorus and Fatih Sultan Mehmet (FSM) bridges in Istanbul — the first two bridges built over the Bosphorus — one sees that these roads triggered the urban sprawl to the north, into the forests, and caused the settlement in water basin areas. This process, driven



4. Istanbul, Galata Bridge-Eminönü (2015). Photograph from the *Port City Talks. Istanbul – Antwerp* exhibition at MAS, Antwerp by E. Dörter, E. S. Fettahoğlu



5. Istanbul, Kadıköy, Haydarpaşa Train Station, (2015) [photo by E. Dörter]



6. Istanbul, Haydarpaşa, vehicle ferry. Photograph from the *Port City Talks. Istanbul – Antwerp* exhibition at MAS, Antwerp by E. Dörter, E. S. Fettahoğlu (2015)

by the Bosphorus bridges and ring roads, has done irreparable damage to the northern forests, water basins, agricultural lands, and important plant and biodiversity sites. The urban sprawl that ensued after FSM and its aftermath is the most concrete example of how major road investments have triggered the population and traffic increase and has affected the physical structure of the city. Considering these past developments, it is not difficult to predict that the city's northern forests and water basins, which should be protected, will be irreversibly damaged by the ongoing Third Bosphorus Bridge, Northern Marmara Motorway and Third Airport projects and the new settlements planned near them.

Today, traffic is not seen as a liquid flowing as directed but rather as a gas that expands to fill the entire usable urban space. As the futurist Glen Hiemstra has said, 'Widening roads to ease traffic congestion is like trying to cure obesity by loosening your belt.' To increase road capacity is not a choice between solving and not solving problems of traffic. There will always be traffic congestion. What is important is to be able to keep the congestion at a bearable level.

If one looks at the present relationship between politics (governance) and planning practices in Istanbul it can be clearly seen that politics does not believe in plans. Plans are produced either to fulfil a legal necessity or to legitimize a project already decided on. Project decisions without planning bring about expensive, lengthy periods of infrastructure building. Continually changing building decisions create and share unearned income derived from urban space, while plans already produced are soon made irrelevant.

In developed societies urban problems are seen not merely as technical matters to be solved by policy makers or city planners; they are political questions of life style to be addressed through the democratic process. The construction of liveable cities requires that those who live in the city make political decisions in a democratic manner. On the other hand, city dwellers must be educated and informed if they are to oppose wrong decisions and practices affecting the areas in which they live. The creation of urban awareness requires above all that correct information regarding the city be transmitted to the people. It is no easy thing to ensure

that people who migrate from rural areas to eke out an existence in the unsanitary and difficult habitats they set up on the peripheries of the city will become individuals sensitive to what is going on beyond their survival concerns. When lack of education and insensitivity to cultural values on the part of these large masses is combined with their will to ‘make it’ and get a relative share of the city’s unearned income, an environment very favourable to the political system distributing this income is created. Without the support and demand of well-informed people with a developed urban awareness, it is impossible to resist the plundering of the city’s resources in the name of modernization and development. The process of creating this awareness takes a long time. But small, decisive steps taken with solidarity in the right direction soon produce positive effects.

Pelin Derviş: Now might be the time to talk about how the two shores of Istanbul have come together. Transport is a very important part of our daily life. It organizes our lives according to the modes available, and these structure our mobility and our memories. People over a certain age today have countless memories of the vehicle ferries — both beautiful and gruelling, including memories of the long queues on the landing docks and suffering in bad weather. Then the first bridge across the Bosphorus entered our lives. The ferries continued to run. The view of the city from the bridge, the view of the bridge from the city and the sea, and of course the continually changing faces of the city. Crossing the Bosphorus on a ferry, feeding seagulls on the open decks with *simit* [sesame bread rings]... It is not my intention to romanticize the experience or concoct a nostalgic discourse. I mean to take a look at what impressions transport leaves in the minds of city dwellers and what they mean. Would you like to start to talk about how we have brought the two sides of the city together?

Haluk Gerçek: I spent my early childhood in Istanbul’s suburb of Samatya. Our house was by the sea and I used to spend hours sitting by the window watching the seagulls and cormorants and the slow progress of small sailing boats so loaded with sand they seemed about to sink. The shore road had not been built yet. People walked



7. Istanbul, first Bosphorus Bridge (2015) [photo by P. Derviş]



8. Istanbul, Bosphorus (2015) [photo by P. Derviş]



9. Istanbul, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, second Bosphorus Bridge (2014)
[photo by P. Derviş]



10. Istanbul, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, second Bosphorus Bridge. Photograph from the *Port City Talks. Istanbul – Antwerp* exhibition at MAS, Antwerp by E. Dörter, E. S. Fettahoğlu (2015)

down to the shore from their houses to go swimming or fishing. My father went back and forth to work in Sirkeci by train. I think it was back then that I began to love trains. Istanbul's suburban trains were dismantled years ago. The city is waiting for its new trains. When you got off at Haydarpaşa Station – whose fate is now up for grabs – you would look out over the extraordinary view of Istanbul from the east side and breathe in the cool sea air. For the past three years every Sunday a handful of people laying claim to the city sit on the steps in front of this historic train station trying to create social awareness of Haydarpaşa Station. Sirkeci Station, terminal of the Orient Express and trains that every day carried thousands of Istanbulites up and down the western shore, also awaits its fate. As I said before, Istanbul is a city of the sea and almost everybody who lives in Istanbul has a daily relationship with the sea. Sometimes your business takes you to the Bosphorus or the Golden Horn. You stand on the Galata Bridge and watch the hustle and bustle of the harbour, the ships, seagulls and people fishing off the lower level. Every day the elegant ferries of Istanbul carry thousands of people between the shores of the city, and I believe the ferry is the most important symbol of Istanbul. The shores of Istanbul were brought together first by the Galata and other Golden Horn bridges, and then by the bridges over the Bosphorus. Since October 2013 a railway tunnel (Marmaray) under the Bosphorus has been carrying Istanbulites between the two shores. A soon-to-be-completed two-storey car tunnel (Eurasia Tunnel) between the two sides will add 80,000 cars a day to the city's heavy traffic.

The coastal city of Istanbul has grown by drawing away from the sea and has become an 'endless' city. New urban areas – with mass housing areas, shopping malls and office buildings – are being established in hills and valleys far from Istanbul's sea. The people who live, work and shop there no longer have any relationship to the sea. When we look at the city from the sea, at the impudent structures rising on what used to be green hills and slopes, we turn our heads away so as not to see.

I want to present some numbers to show the effects of this swift and savage urban spatial transformation on the mobility pattern: only 21.5 per cent of Istanbulites (3.1 million people) and

28 per cent of employees (1.2 million) can access a pier in fifteen minutes by public transport. Only 20 per cent of Istanbulites can commute to work or return home across the Bosphorus within an hour by ferry. As a result, while nearly one in ten daily journeys involves crossing the Bosphorus, only one in five of those is made by ferries. The problem integrating sea lines and other public transport modes is an important reason why sea journeys are so few. Considering the time lost in waiting and making transfers in public transport and the slow average speed of buses and minibuses caught in traffic jams, the average travel time by car, despite heavy traffic congestion, is still shorter than that of public transport. For example, according to 2012 data, the average travel time across the Bosphorus by car is 74 minutes while that of public transport, including the trips by the fast metrobus system, is 85 minutes.

It is now understood that the Bosphorus bridges carry cars, not people, and have in time become congested with the traffic they created. More bridges will inevitably make the situation worse. If we look at it from the point of view of a smart city planning for the management of transport demands between the two sides, the present situation looks like this: in Istanbul 63 per cent of the population and 70 per cent of the employment is on the west side. The job-housing balance in cities is an important means of accessibility. The unequal job-housing distribution between the two sides of the Bosphorus is the major reason why 1.5 million people cross the Bosphorus every day. What needs to be done is, on the one hand, to reduce the demand for transport across the Bosphorus with planned and balanced urban development, and, on the other, to increase public transport capacity by developing the rail transit system and sea transport.

* This interview was first published in Murat Tabanlıoğlu (ed.), *Port City Talks. Istanbul. Antwerp*, BAI & MAS Books, Antwerp 2015, pp. 90-94.

