

READING CHANGES IN ARCHITECTURE OF A CITY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

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Extended Abstract

Comperative photography or rephotography containing the critical value affords us comprehensive insight into changing reality of time and space, and “opens a space for the analysis of place” [1]. Such photographs, where the overlapping patterns of a city are depicted, gain great value as the witness to time and space revealing the development and the values added, subtracted, transformed or lost in time. Farinelli says the static nature of photograhic image is the best way to understand and recover a sense of civitas [2]. Architecture historian and photograher Professor Reha Günay’s exhibit of comperative photography titled “Disappearing İstanbul” explicitly reveals the the dramatic changes in architecture of the city, culture of construction and socio-cultural values. The photograpgs of urban space, streets and buildings in different neighbourhoods of İstanbul taken from the same or similar viewpoints at certain intervals, varying between 10 and 40 years, have become documented evidence about the rapid change in the city.

Objectives

Interpreting the photographs in an exhibition titled “ Disappearing İstanbul” in an endavour to search for hidden or the explicit meanings in the visual material, this study underscores the significance of the critical value of architectural photography. Within this scope, the main objectives of this paper are

- to present the subjective and objective readings of the photographs taken in the streets of Üsküdar, a historic town on the Asian side in İstanbul,
- to discuss the changing meaning of the built environment with its socio-cultural background,
- to draw attention to some consequences of the vanishing culture of the local timber-frame structures.

Representative instances and their interpretation

One of the photograph, for instance, taken in 1973 depicts the interface of the urban space in between Valide Atik Complex, which is one of the significant examples of Architect Sinan’s monumental edifices, a 16th century building, and on the other side, traditional wooden houses right facing it, which replaced with new apartment buildings or improper renovations, as seen in the second photo taken in 2010. Whereas a strong Gestalt, a sharp

contrast appears very clearly in the old picture: massive and solid impression of the gray stone wall of the complex versus fragile and elegant expression of wooden dwellings, small cubes and prisms.



Fig. 1-2: Valide Atik Complex and its near surrounding (1973-2010), Anatolian Castle (1969-2010)

While wooden structures built by their owners and master builders, a reflection of well-known harmonious interaction between social patterns and architecture, appear to be much more architectural rather than ordinary apartment buildings designed by architects or engineers in compliance with legal procedures and regulations in certain degree. There seem no measure having been taken in the windows of old timber-frame houses for preventing break-ins, but in the modern buildings, which were replaced with the old ones, even in the upper floors we see bars on their windows.

These dual depicted narratives were analysed through personal observation and memories, interview with Prof. Günay, the author of the exhibition[3], and the book titled "Wooden Houses of Disappearing İstanbul", and finally the literature on Photography.

Epilogue:

Architecture is open to analysis like any other aspect of experience, and is made more vivid by comparisons (4). The before and after photographs are useful tools "to provoke acts of memory recalling us to things, places, and people. They establish connections across time and space, inducing chains of association."(5) Taking a retrospective look at the urban space and daily life, the photographs in question are not only nostalgic images, but also remember us what we have lost, what values we have exchanged in the name of so-called modernization and progress, and the clues to how we can recover from unsustainable growth.

References

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