

Istanbul. Risks in the historic urban topography? Visual impact assessment study of Istanbul UNESCO World Heritage site

The intention is to present some observations, documentation material (mostly of 2006) and principal arguments to evaluate the visual impact of high-rise building developments in Istanbul UNESCO World Heritage site.

Traditional sights, landmarks and monuments as well as the protected urban silhouette are in danger. Serious consequences are to be expected due to global investment dominance in public space and skyline.

The Visual Impact Study of Istanbul with two maps concerning the metropolitan area (see also the **Metropolitan Area Visual Impact Assessment Study** map) and the historic town centre (see also the **Historic Centre Visual Impact Assessment Study** map) is intended to give an impression of the prospective unprecedented scale of global building development within the urban topography (see also the **photographic presentation**) and to support a discussion and moderation of conflicts in favour of Istanbul's traditional public space, the unique topography, and the prospects and panoramas.

The starting point of this pilot study is Melling's topographical survey "Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore" (Paris 1819). Some of his viewpoints as Eyüp, Çamlica and Galata Tower are still very popular as publicly accessible viewpoints in the metropolitan area of Istanbul. They form characteristic prospects, panoramas and visual axes in the historic urban landscape of today's metropolitan area (see also the **photographic presentation**).

The World Heritage site Istanbul was adopted in 1985 in the boundaries of the Peninsula, not including Galata and without a buffer zone to protect the surroundings. This research and photo presentation intends to direct one's eyes to the recent building development of the Istanbul metropolitan area. It wishes to call the attention to current disturbances and destructions as well as to conceivable dangers which the colossal new development projects would entail (see also the two maps of the **Visual Impact Assessment Study of the Metropolitan Area** and the **Historic Centre**). The evaluation should stimulate a discussion concerning the necessity to define a buffer zone and its boundaries in order to protect the effective range and authentic visibility of the WH Site within the metropolitan urban landscape.

A further aspect of this presentation could be a critical review of the existing high-scale buildings as to whether they should be considered as characteristic landmarks and appreciated icons in one of the most beautiful ancient cities of the world. By this it might be possible to define elements of urban and architectural qualities and topics to create a 21st century modern Istanbul skyline without compromising the outstanding universal values for which it was put on the World Heritage List in the first place. Today several skyscrapers of Beyo lu, Sisli and Levent appear, but they do not give the impression of a planned skyline.

Istanbul's metropolitan area finds itself in the middle of a rapid process of drastic urban transformation, a renewal with new big-scale building complexes and skyscraper clusters of unprecedented dimensions as to their cubic measure, density and extreme elevation. Since the late 1970s high-rise buildings generally did not grow to more than 100 m while the new generation of skyscrapers is expected to start with 300 m and to end by about 650 m. To put this into perspective with the scale of the landscape: the highest mountain, the Çamlica, rises to about 260 m. Comparable to this is also the change of bulk and height of the projected Galata Port development with a mass of up to five gigantic cruise ships located in the historic Tophane area.

This presentation concentrates on only some of the colossal building development projects under discussion such as Haydarpasa, Dubai Towers, Bosphorus Tower and Galataport, which might come

in conflict with the World Heritage sites of Istanbul. With regard to these projects a general lack of official information and transparency on the side of the metropolitan administration has to be stated.

In a general way these simulations may map out a coming reality even if the elements of skyscrapers and ships were chosen without detailed knowledge of the actual projects and plans and even without a topographical town-plan which would indicate the exact locations. Nevertheless, it might be relevant for the discussion to recognize the gigantic scale of the development project, to visualize the dimensions of urban renewal and to become aware of the alarming extent of the impending transformation within the metropolitan area of a WH site. Even if there were aesthetic design alternatives of iconic architectural works created by "star architects", this would not really diminish the risk of compromising the outstanding universal value of Istanbul's historic urban landscape.

This presentation, realised at the Technical University of Berlin by **Prof. Dr. Astrid Debold-Kritter** as a member of ICOMOS CIVVIH, concerns a number of colossal development projects. At the Department for Town and Regional Planning, Prof. Debold-Kritter was assisted by **Dipl. Ing. Canan Saĝnak**, student research assistant **Jan Polívka** and cartographer **Sibylle Hengstmann-Reusch**. The topic was stimulated by the ICOMOS CIVVIH Scientific Symposium on "Historic Centres in Metropolitan Areas" held in Istanbul in 2005.