

ASSESSMENT OF THE URBAN AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE FENER-BALAT DISTRICTS

Sevgul Limoncu & Banu Celebioglu



Fener and Balat districts are located in the Historical Peninsula, in the region stretching between the Golden Horn in the south and the Byzantine city walls in the west.



Fener and Balat, which were once the focal point of the social and cultural lives of Greek, Jewish and Armenian minorities, now host a Muslim population, many of whom have migrated from other cities and rural areas and do not have enough economic resources for the preservation of the architectural structures, and for the renovation and maintenance of the old buildings.



Greek
Patriarchate

□ FENER

Because the Greek Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church are situated in Fener, this district had always been a region where the Greek population concentrated since the Byzantine period.

□ BALAT

Apart from a small Armenian community living in the district, Balat had always been a Jewish district since the Byzantine period.



Fener Greek School



Jewish Hospital in Balat

□ FENER

Towards the end of the 19th century, a fundamental change began to take place in the demographic structure of the district with the first wave of migration to bourgeois districts such as The Prince Islands.

□ BALAT

After the second half of the 19th century, the richest residents left the district and moved to Galata, where Jewish institutions including the Chief Rabbinate and important synagogues are still situated today.



Old photo of Fener

□ FENER - BALAT

The main reasons for this change in those districts were

- the decrease of commercial activity along the Golden Horn,
- 1894 earthquake,
- recurrent fires in the area.

- the decision of Henry Prost, an urban planner, to bring industry to the district in the 1930s. This caused the historical houses inhabited by the Greek population to be replaced by ateliers and factories.

□ FENER

After the second wave of migration in the 1960s, when Greeks left the country in large numbers, the district was settled by a low-income population particularly from the Black Sea Region.

□ BALAT

Following this period, the Jewish community in Balat became a minority, and a new wave of migration from the Black Sea Region greatly changed the face of the district. The working class population who were attracted to the district by job opportunities and lower rents changed the social structure of Balat.

The district continued to be a mainly industrial area until the 1980s, when the Golden Horn cleaning project was started by the Mayor of the time.



In the north, there is a transit road that follows the Golden Horn coastline and connects to the peripheral highway.

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In the west, there are several monuments such as churches, mosques and a bath.



In the south, there are taller and more recently constructed buildings.



In the East, there are taller and newer buildings and land belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.



In fact, the fires that raged in the city in the 19th century caused the urban structure to change to a great extent. A new type of housing that radically separated with the Ottoman period, namely, rows of houses became prevalent in Balat and Fener as they better met the security needs against disasters. These are adjacent buildings running along the road, built on small narrow plots, separated by fire-protection walls, with entrances above the street level.



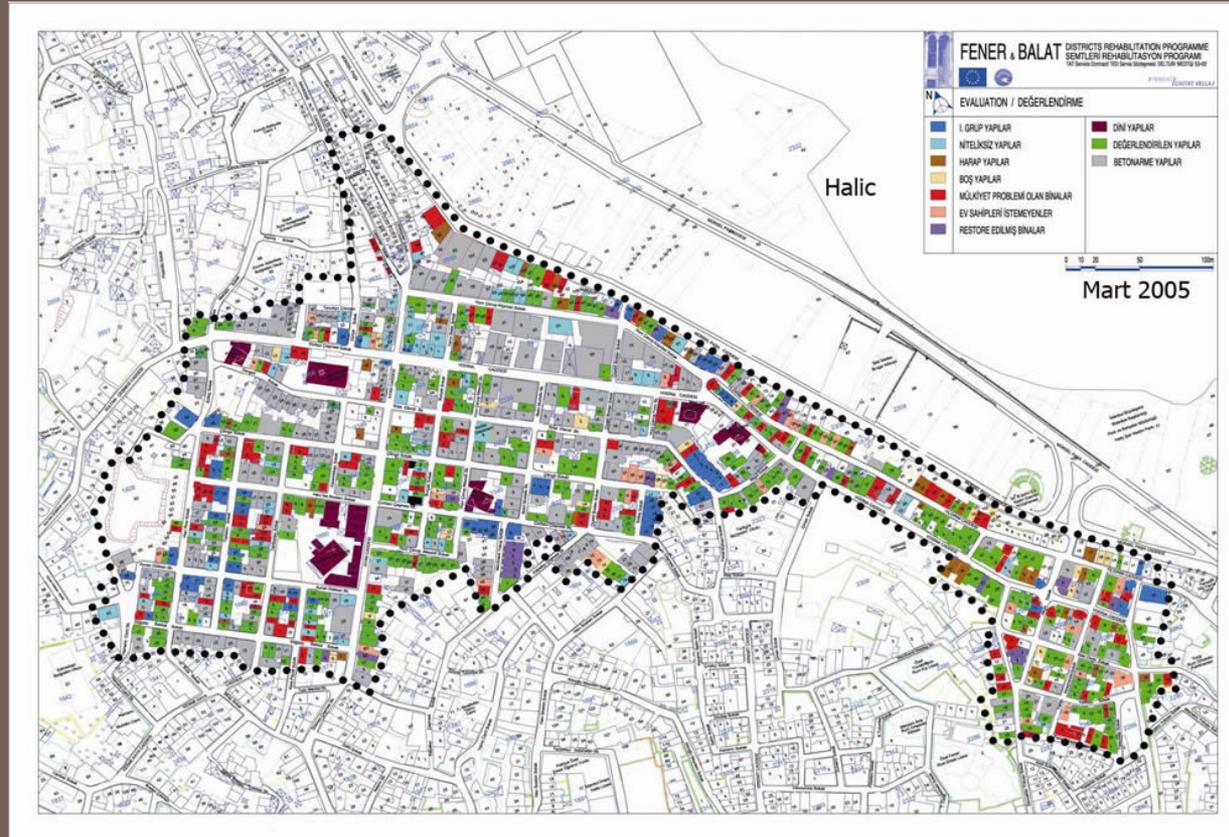
- dense urban space.
- few interior courtyards.
- limited Public spaces
- no playgrounds or parks for children

The process which began with the non-industrialization of the Golden Horn in the 1980s entered a new phase during the Habitat Summit hosted by Istanbul in 1996, and the idea of rehabilitation of Fener and Balat districts was proposed.

The European Commission, the municipality of Fatih, the French Institute of Anatolian Studies and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) conducted a feasibility study in 1997 and 1998 for the rehabilitation of the Fener and Balat district, with the participation of Fener and Balat Societies.

This study aimed to support not only the rehabilitation of the buildings, but also the rehabilitation of the social structure by proposing feasible solutions to the housing problem in the historical texture. It is aimed to improve the living standards of the poor residents as well as their social status and health conditions without forcing them to leave their homes. In other words, this study became an urban rehabilitation project with a social responsibility.

The study was also planned as a pilot project for the social rehabilitation programs which proposed the active participation of the inhabitants. As a result of the study, a report called The Rehabilitation of Balat and Fener Districts (the 1998 Report) was prepared.



In 1998, a program that was designed based on this feasibility study was included in the European Union – Mediterranean Partners (MEDA) Programs which are financed by the European Union. The first step towards the implementation of the Program was taken in 2000.



The Fener Balat Rehabilitation Project was planned on four different levels:

- Restoration of the buildings,
- Renovation of a social center and
- Renovation of the Balat *Carsi*, and
- Solid waste management.

The restoration process included various stages such as

- reviewing the municipal plans,
- determining the architectural and social evaluation criteria,
- evaluating the applicants based on the defined criteria and deciding which buildings will be restorate,
- reviewing their construction licenses,
- preparing projects,
- getting approval from the Conservation Council and getting permission for construction,
- preparing tender documents to determine the contractor firms that will carry out the restoration,
- announcing the tenders,
- coordinating, inspecting and approving the construction work, and
- checking the progress bills.



The Technical Support Team began its work in 2003 and the rehabilitation project was completed in 2008. When the results of the applications of the rehabilitation project are examined, it can be seen that the restoration aspect of the project did not reach the targeted 200 renovations due to budget and time constraints; 121 buildings were restored and two social centres were rehabilitated in the process. The solid waste management aspect of the project could only be carried out for a short period of time. The target to provide jobs to the unemployed in the district during the restoration period could never be achieved.

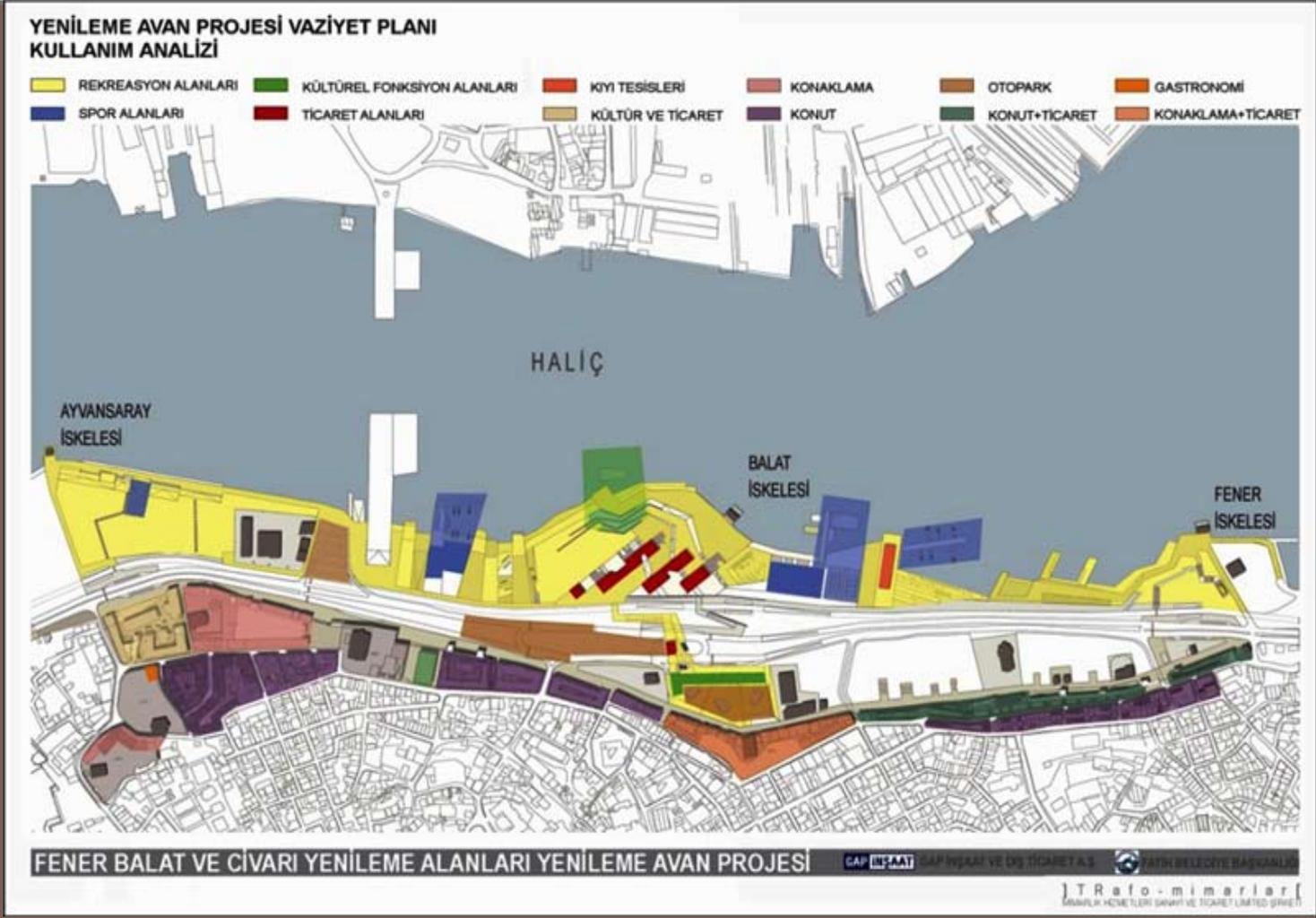
This period was also the beginning of the gentrification period of Fener – Balat, as the district came to be in demand by a different income group. The growing interest in spaces with historical qualities that started around 2000 also affected the Fener – Balat region, and it was declared a renovation area in 2006. Using an uncommon method, the region was divided into different sections which would be assigned to different offices determined by the project coordinator so that different projects would be obtained. The aim was to create a district that would serve as an “architectural exhibition” as a result of the work of different architects.



The preliminary project plan was approved on December 27, 2007. The completion date for the project was determined as September 3, 2010. However, the project has still not been completed.



The Fener-Balat Renovation Project is also the biggest urban transformation project developed until today in terms of its area. The area that the Fener-Balat Renovation Project covers is 279.345,91 square meters, and it is made up of a total of 59 blocks and 909 plots. The Project consists mainly of two regions, namely, the green areas along the coast and the residential areas containing housing and commercial buildings.



The Project aims to join the buildings on the coastal strip to obtain various spaces, to remove the sports facilities along the shore, to construct new buildings with various functions inside the parks, and to establish a marina on the coastal strip.



The Renovation Project was decided to be approached on the basis of blocks of buildings rather than on the basis of plots because of the intricacy of the plot structure in the residential area and the difficulty to find development solutions for very small plots. This would mean joining the interior spaces of buildings that are on the same block. This practise has been criticised as the existing structural qualities in a historical area should not be changed and the historical qualities should be protected.



It is predicted that, when the project is completed, most of the owners of the buildings will not be the people who have lived there for years, but people who have newly acquired the deeds from those who could not afford to pay the contribution payments to the project.

CONCLUSION

The Fener – Balat Rehabilitation and Renovation Projects have problems concerning

- the administrative and legal aspects,
- infrastructure,
- socio-psychological aspects,
- cost, and sustainability.



The Fener – Balat Renovation Project involves the risk of becoming a project which will result in greater injustice for a greater number of people than the Rehabilitation Project. Ownership rights, which were taken into account during the Rehabilitation Project are given less attention in this project, so it is feared that more residents will have to be displaced. What needs to be done is to continue the implementation of the Fener Balat Rehabilitation Project, to repair the district with long-term, non-interest government loans, and to gain the district into a tourism centre.



This district is one of the regions of Istanbul that is proposed to be developed in terms of tourism because of its historical, natural, cultural and urban potentials. The potentials of the district are quite significant both on national and international scale, and if developed, it will provide an important economic input to the city and to the region. In this respect, points that must be taken into consideration when designing a new project are listed below:

- . A preliminary Project Plan should be prepared for the entire region, and all the interrelated components should be figured out in this preliminary project.



-Projects must aim to preserve cultural heritage but also include the rehabilitation of cafes, restaurants, shops and hotels which are at the centre of urban environment and economic activity. Their qualities and quantities are limited.



City hotel in a historic building



. In many developed countries, architectural works constitute the greatest tourism attraction, so architectural tours are an important and indispensable part of city tourism programs. On the other hand, events related to architecture make up another important part of architectural tourism. Many cities have become significant tourist centres with architectural exhibitions, workshops and conferences. Similarly, in this region, in addition to the development of the available historical texture, the new buildings that will be built along the coastal strip should primarily be planned as venues that can host architectural events. The location of these buildings should be determined in advance on the preliminary project.



. Assuming that Riva Foundation and “TSKF Balat Cultural House” will have a positive contribution to the local residents and to the development of tourism in the area, more of them should be established.



car park

. All kinds of harmful and polluting activities, especially garages, storehouses, wholesalers, industry, underground and above-ground car parks and temporary constructions should be banned. The city walls should be repaired and illegal buildings should be removed.

. Public facilities (educational and health facilities, open/green areas, playgrounds, sports facilities, religious facilities etc) should be renewed, increased and completed to meet the demand.

- . One-way streets should be built to ease pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and car parks should be built for the local residents and visitors.
- . Green areas, proper lighting, crossroads and squares should be arranged, and the value of the city wall gates should be exposed.
- . Projects should be directed towards the needs of those who are currently living in the region, and they should be planned with their participation. It can be more easily achieved under the leadership of non-governmental organizations and with the cooperation of the Municipality.
- . Damage threatening the structure of the buildings should be eliminated as soon as possible with the implementation of urgent programs.



Thank you for listening...