



The reuse and conservation of Ottoman commercial inns on the Historic Peninsula in Istanbul

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Abstract - The basic characteristic of Ottoman bazaars is that they consist of rows of small shops along streets, while modern shopping malls are dominated by the food, beverage and entertainment industry together with large scale shops. The Historic Peninsula in Istanbul was a commercial center accessed by traders via the sea and land routes, and that is where they exchanged and sold their goods since it was settled as a residential area, and this continues to the present day. Traditional Ottoman bazaars had large courtyards which also were social public spaces. The aim of this paper is to discuss in detail the existing problems and difficulties involved in the adaptive reuse of Ottoman Trade Inns located on the Historic Peninsula in Istanbul, particularly inns with courtyards that were built up until the end of 19th century. Recommendations will be given in terms of the protection and reuse of Ottoman Inns in a way that is integrated with daily life.

Keywords: Ottoman inns, reuse, conservation, historical peninsula

1. Ottoman Commercial inns Located in the Historic Peninsula in Istanbul

1.1. The zone of the inn region

The zone of the historic peninsula in Istanbul, which is surrounded by the districts of Eminonu, Beyazıt and Mahmutpasha, was a commercial area where trade was carried out by sea and by land, and it has continued to be a center of trade down to the present day. This area, known as the Inn District, differs from other urban spaces in that it has primarily been commercial rather than residential. Large open courtyards situated at the center of the inns were typical of Ottoman bazaars, and these were also public spaces that played an important role in social life. In the past, traders from such places as Algiers, Cairo, Tunis, Venice, Genoa and Malta met at bazaars and established trade relationships through the purchase and sale of goods and merchandise [4-6]. Traders stored their goods in rooms located on the ground floor of inns as well as the upper floors. The courtyards of some inns were used for auctions, sales, bartering and wholesale transactions, while in others they were used for the production of goods. Most inns are two story buildings with thick walls, and they have long been renowned for their solid construction.

The inn region was one of the most important centers of trade on the historic peninsula, as well as Istanbul as a whole, because of its historical and commercial character. But in the last century, it has lost its status as the center of the city and has deteriorated both physically and socially.

1.2. The inns located close to the Grand Bazaar

The majority of the inns dating from the Ottoman era that were built on the historical peninsula are clustered around the Grand Bazaar. This area, known today as the inn district, stretches southward from the port to the Grand Bazaar, occupying an area of 50 hectares (500,000 m²). In the Ottoman era, from the 15th century to the first quarter of the 20th

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century, nearly 300 inns were built and 110 of them are still standing today [1-2-3]. The oldest existing inn, the *Kurkçu Han*, was built in the years 1450-55 during the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and is the only remaining example from that period. There are a number of inns with dual courtyards that are quite representative of their time periods, and these are the *Balkapanı Han* (16th century), *Vezir Han* (17th century) and *Buyuk Yeni Han* (18th century) [2-3-5].

While some of the inns are located outside the Grand Bazaar in neighboring areas, others can only be accessed from within the Grand Bazaar itself (Figure 1). The inns that are accessible from inside the Grand Bazaar are used for the production and repair of goods that are sold there, such as rugs and flat-weave carpets as well as a variety of other products made from copper, brass and silver. Inns located in close proximity to the Grand Bazaar continue to be commercial spaces connected to the operations and atmosphere of the bazaar. In addition to their functions as places of wholesale trading and storage, there is a concentration of inns around the bazaar that are used for specialized types of production such as casting, polishing, stove-making and metallurgy, including gold and silver work.

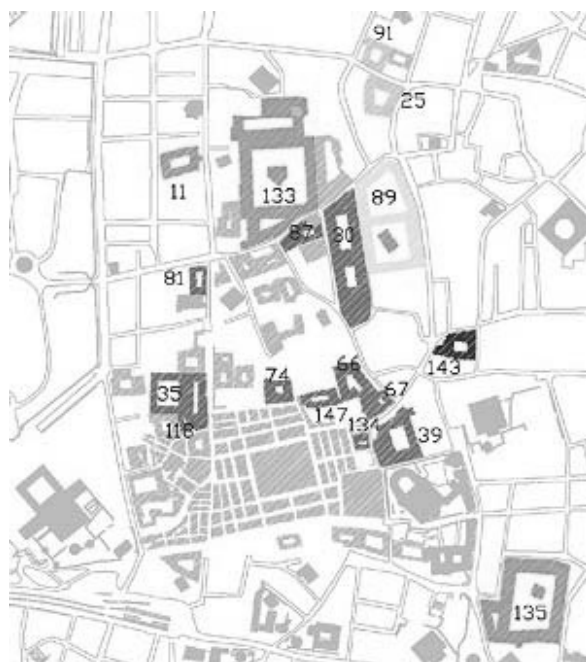


Figure 1. Some inns around the closed bazaar [2]

1.3. The architectural features of Ottoman inns

Ottoman inns were constructed in a manner that suited the topography and parcel of land on which they were built. Sometimes they were constructed in such a way that they constituted a singular city block and in others their facades ran the length of a street. In such cases, they resulted in the creation of the facades of long streets in the Inn District and opened the way for the region to acquire an urban identity that differed from the rest of the city.

Ottoman inns were accessed from the street through a passage that led into the courtyard and from there the colonnades and individual rooms were accessible. In other words, the rooms themselves did not have street access (Figure 2). Likewise, shops located on the street were not accessible through the central courtyard. In this way, the courtyards of inns constituted an inner world that was separated from life on the streets outside [2-3].

Based on the inns that have survived to the present day, we can see that they consist of a courtyard surrounded by a colonnade in which there are rooms with windows. The majority of inns have two floors, but some have up to five.

The facades of the inns, which define the buildings' relationship to the street, consist of rows of shops. The inns dating from the 16th century have a single courtyard and are comprised of two stories and a cellar. The rooms on the upper story generally have two windows, which are framed in stone and topped by a pointed archway. Today, a

significant number of these inns are used for both the production and sale of traditional commercial items such as handmade toys, dyed fabrics, inlaid mother of pearl, calligraphy, marbled paper, hand-woven goods, embroidery, baskets, wooden boxes, hookahs and pipes. In the 18th century, there was no longer room in the Inn District for the construction of inns with large courtyards so fewer of them were built. During and after the 19th century, inns were built on smaller plots of land but were taller due to the introduction of new building technologies that employed concrete and steel. In that century, we begin to see inns that are four and five stories tall, but their inner courtyards are no longer open to the sky as they were transformed into enclosed areas accessed by stairs.



Figure 2. Cebeci Inn (17th yy), ground floor plan [2]

2. Current Problems of Reuse and Conservation

In the Inn District, structural and physical deterioration has occurred as the result of a number of negative impacts such as socio-cultural change. In the last 25-30 years, the concept of “commercial function” has been transformed in the urban spaces of the city and taken on a new scale as the result of numerous developments including the appearance of large-scale facilities for shopping, the domination of industrialists in management and planning, increased access to the possibilities offered by modern technology and people’s desire to work in a better environment. As a result, many operations have been moved to large-scale plazas and shopping centers.

Even if the Grand Bazaar and the surrounding inns have managed to retain their importance throughout history as major locales of trade in Istanbul, shifts in focus in trade, modes of production and consumption patterns have changed, resulting in significant changes in the Inn District.

2.1. Unplanned development and deterioration of the urban fabric

The most rapid changes in the Inn District occurred in the early years of the Turkish Republic (1938-1950). The creation of Eminonu Square completely eliminated the urban fabric of the area surrounding Yeni Mosque. With the rerouting of transit traffic, the shoreline of Eminonu was cut off from the interior (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Eminonu Square in 1945 (<https://www.google.com.tr/search?q=eminönü+1945&tbm>)

The unplanned development of cities and the construction of excessively tall buildings made possible by the granting of building rights within the framework of new urban plans has had a detrimental effect on historical buildings and resulted in their disappearance from the urban fabric. The construction of tall buildings around the inns of Istanbul led to their elimination from the city's skyline, and the increase in the density of buildings has led to the widening of the narrow streets where the inns are located. Furthermore, increases in sound pollution and the introduction of undesirable foreign elements have had a negative impact on the visual unity of the historical surroundings and the harmonious effect of the setting.

2.2 .Problems of ownership

In the Ottoman era, almost all public works, including buildings and edifices that were used in daily life such as mosques, theological schools, public baths, bridges, fountains, waterworks and soup kitchens were constructed by the sultan, his family and other upper-level figures in the government. To ensure their sustainability, these works were supported by funds generated by bazaars, inns and caravansarays, which were endowed as foundations. All sectors of society, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender and social status, were able to take advantage of the services offered by these foundations. Nearly all of the social services provided today by modern states were operated by such foundations in the Ottoman era. The foundations that were established in the Ottoman Empire and whose directors are no longer alive are now represented and administered by the Directorate General of Foundations. In the 1930s, after years of successive wars and increased poverty, foundations sold some of the inns, caravansarays and bazaars that were in their possession. Today, the majority of the historical inns in the Inn District are under the control of private owners.

As a result of these divisions of ownership, a large number of inns have fallen into disrepair. In many cases, due to a lack of authority or as the result of private ownership, alterations have been made that did not exist in the original design, including the construction of mezzanines, additions made to rooms, the construction of new rooms in colonnades, the closing off of colonnades and the construction of new buildings in courtyards. Physically, the inns began to deteriorate and as a result they have quickly begun to lose their original character. As the result of socio-cultural changes occurring in the district, illegal actions have been carried out, such as the renting out of properties by tenants. Consequently, there has been an increase in activities carried out either through ignorance of the historical value of the inns or through vandalism which have resulted in damage to the buildings.

2.3. Changes in function

Along with the shops on the ground floors of inns, there are also smaller commercial spaces on the first floor which are used for the sale of daily goods such as clothes, thread, yarn, fabric, hajj supplies, bridal gowns, shoes, furnishings and curtains. However, many signs and pictures have been hung on the walls, resulting in destruction of the facades

and their visual deterioration. The rooms on the second and upper floors are used for the storage of wholesale goods (textiles, curtains, fabric) and there are small workshops as well (for carpentry, steel work, nickleplating, tinning, the production of silver and copper goods, tailoring, food services and publishing productions) [4-5-6].

It has been noted that many of the people who originally worked in those spaces left to take up work in newly built spaces that offered greater comfort and there were also changes that occurred in the sectors in which they worked that caused them to relocate. Migrants to Istanbul then occupied those spaces, launching their own small businesses. Starting in the 1950s, the quality of life in the Inn District began to decline with increasing rapidity.

In place of the traditional craftwork that had been carried out at the inns for hundreds of years, the rooms began to be used for the storage of hazardous materials such as paint, chemical cleaners, and combustible and explosive liquids. In particular, such usage of storage spaces, which has brought about the deterioration of the historical buildings and led them to become derelict, has contributed significantly to the problems existing at the inns even though storage for such wholesale commerce could be carried out at any other location. The fact that such a dangerous state of affairs exists in the district, coupled with a lack of control mechanisms, constitutes a risk for the other historical monuments in the area and poses a threat to the inns.

Some of the individuals using the spaces of the inns have made illegal additions as well, including expanding the size of their shops by building out into the shared corridors of the inn, closing off sections of colonnades and even constructing extensions to the outside of the buildings to add workspaces. Furthermore, single- and double-story shops and workshops have been built in the courtyards of inns.

Such additions were initially made with materials that could easily be removed, but those were later reinforced with more permanent materials such as fired bricks and brick blocks. Over time, new additions have been made on top of those as well. Such additions occupy the central courtyard area, blocking off the structure of the building. It has been found that the owners of the properties, seeking to enlarge their space, have detracted from the architecture of the inns by adding mezzanines on the upper floors of inns, as well as building mezzanine floors in colonnades, knocking down walls to join rooms, blocking off colonnades and building additional rooms in corridors, and building rooms against the facades of the courtyard walls which have in some cases been plastered over and painted (figure 4). The creation of additional rooms by blocking off colonnades and the creation of corridors between them makes it difficult to recognize the colonnades for what they are.



Figure 4. Additional rooms in Buyuk Yeni Inn (17th yy) [2]

2.4. *Deterioration of the traditional physical structure*

The changes that are occurring in today's society in the economy, technology, scholarly research and socio-cultural and political developments are being felt quite strongly in spaces of commerce and shopping. The shops where most

of the business owners at the inns try to carry out their trade are often rather cramped spaces on the ground floor. It has been noted that some tenants have thinned the walls just to be able to get another half of a square meter in the space of their shops and knocked down parts of walls to create passageways between rooms. Some walls have even been completely removed. The stone facades of inns have been altered to create spaces to display wares and advertise, and mezzanine floors have been added to spaces (figure 5). Some business owners have even wanted to remove the flooring so they could construct a cellar below. Heating and cooling apparatuses have been attached to the facades of inns to make up for the physical deficiencies of the workspaces, and heating stoves have been added as well. Electrical wiring and telephone lines have been installed, in addition to plumbing. As a result of these alterations, the original architecture of the inns has suffered greatly.

The random construction of mezzanine floors, the building of dividing walls, the opening of display spaces in facades facing the street and the construction of new entrances have resulted in rapid changes in the inns. A mezzanine floor, added to the second-story colonnade at an inn to increase the space, was built all the way up to the steel tie rod which was then used to support its weight. It has been noted that entire walls have been removed so that large machines could be brought into inns that are used as workshops and it is thought that the vibrations created by those machines have further strained the structure of the buildings themselves. Such uses of inns have been detrimental to their original structure and led to structural damage such as cracks, separation, collapses and crumbling.



Figure 5. Mezzanine floors in Balkapanı Inn (17th yy) [3]

2.5. Lack of awareness of the historical environment

Much damage has been inflicted on the historical Inn District as individuals move to the city with the aim of doing business but are unaware of the historical value of the places where they conduct their trade. The socio-cultural values of the property owners lead to inappropriate approaches to the treatment of the buildings which brings about destruction of the historical ambiance of the area as well as physical damage to the inns. Even if the original facades of some inns have been preserved, it has been noted that the courtyards are undergoing a negative transformation. While the contours of the courtyards may still be visible, additions made to rooms and colonnades using modern construction materials have resulted in a state of affairs in which the original architecture is disappearing (Figure 6). It has also been noted that concrete multistory buildings have been built on the premises of inns, leading to a situation in which the original design has been altered and is no longer discernable.



Figure 6. Additional rooms in the porticos of Balkapanı Inn (17th yy) [3]

2.6. Problems of transportation and parking

Due to the fact that there aren't any parking lots in the district, the courtyards of the majority of inns are used as parking areas and delivery trucks bringing and picking up goods enter the courtyards as well. The tremors created by such vehicles as they come and go has a negative impact on the buildings of the inns. In addition, the streets in the district aren't broad enough for the large amount of vehicular and foot traffic, leading to yet another negative situation, along with the problems created by the loading, unloading and storage of goods. Because the district is not residential, at night it is rather empty, thus leading to problems of security; additionally, the grounds in the area aren't looked after and are unkempt (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Cars in the courtyard of Vezir Inn (17th yy) [3]

Along with the problems associated with transportation, services, environmental concerns and the destruction of historical and cultural values, the area has excessively heavy vehicular and foot traffic. The courtyards of most of the inns, which were built at a time when it was unthinkable that the area would be subjected to such heavy traffic, are used for parking, as well as loading and unloading during the day; while it is difficult to determine precisely to what extent the tremors caused by this heavy vehicular traffic have damaged the inns, it is known that the traffic has caused a significant amount of problems [3]. The tremors caused by large vehicles travels through the ground and the

foundations of the buildings, resulting in irreparable damage to the buildings themselves, and inns that have a weak structure or have developed structural damage over time are susceptible to collapses and cracks in various structural elements, as well as problems caused by settling of the foundation. In addition, plastering can come loose and fall off as well.

4. The Adaptive Reuse of inns

Adaptive reuse involves the re-utilization of a building which is sound in construction and structure but has lost its original purpose because of functional, environmental and/or economical reasons, and thereby giving it a new function. In this way, utilizing historical inns which are under threat is very important for ensuring cultural and historical sustainability. The adaptive reuse of historical buildings requires an evaluation of their existing structural and spatial qualities in terms of the new needs that will arise. Decisions made in this regard should involve correct approaches regarding the protection of historical buildings so that they can be passed along to future generations. Inns located in commercial areas can be adaptively reused so long as their particular architectural qualities, contours and heights are maintained; for example, they can be used for non-polluting handicrafts such as glass painting, porcelain and ceramic art, handmade toy production, embroidery, production of fabric goods, painting, natural stone work, book binding and repairing, sculpture, and wood and copper working. They can also be used for marketing, small-scale repair work, exhibitions and sales, as well as food and beverage services (restaurants and cafeterias) and cultural activities.

In recent times there has been an increase in the number of inns that are slotted for adaptive reuse as hotels. However, the modern necessities for hotel rooms such as plumbing, lighting, and heating and cooling units will lead to the destruction of the architecture of inns. It is a fact that even if traditional materials are used in the process of adaptive reuse, the architectural layout of an inn will be changed, and this includes the transformation of wall structures with facades consisting of stacked stone and of floors and roofs. When refunctioning inns as hotels it is quite difficult to create the large open areas which are needed for dining and convention facilities, and demolishing and/or integrating the 15-20 square meter rooms typical of inns or adding rooms to the open courts of inns obliterates the original structure. There have also been cases in which uninformed and unregulated changes have resulted in external appearances which clash with the local historical identity and are unsuitable in terms of the urban fabric. In order to prevent this, conservation regulations should include extensive detailed clauses, and civil society organizations and legal authorities should ensure that the laws are followed.

If the destruction of historical textures is to be prevented, comprehensive determination and documentation studies should be carried out so that the original functions of the many inns that are currently being used can be maintained, and adaptive reuse should not be geared towards hotels but traditional trade in consideration of the region's needs. The adaptive reuse of historical inns in the region should be limited by public initiatives to thematic functions with the aim of encouraging traditional handicraft production and cultural activities such as the display of these products.

5. Conclusions

The original contours and template of the cultural riches of the Inn District should be protected and any of the additions that have been made should be eliminated once it has been determined that they are not worthy of protection. Proposed buildings should not be taller than registered buildings on adjacent plots and should adhere to the original tenets of the plan that had been drawn up for the district.

Aside from the registered buildings in the district, the other buildings should be subjected to a comprehensive evaluation and a decision should be made regarding the function and plans for plots of land. In such a situation, any new buildings should be planned in a manner that is suitable for and respectful of the historical ambiance of the district, taking into account such factors as traditional materials and techniques of construction and the original plan and configuration, including the original windows, doors, doorframes and overhangs [3].

Existing original structures should be protected and restorations should be carried out in a manner that suits the original architecture, materials of construction and structural system.

The original courtyard system of historical inns should be protected and they should be set aside for use as common open areas.

The original character of the streets and their paving should be protected, and the amount of vehicular traffic should be reduced.

The most important factor in ensuring that sustainable urban protection can be realized in the Inn District is the inclusion of property owners in administration and their participation in the process of protection and planning. However, because it will be quite difficult to realize such efforts given the current laws and institutional framework in Turkey, a new body of laws that takes into account protection and restoration needs to be developed. For implementation, quality standards should be developed and restoration centers should be established to support similar projects in other parts of the city. The positive effects of properly executed improvement projects should be shared so that other projects can benefit from them as well. Public involvement should be required to ensure the realization of sustainable improvement practices. Opportunities for new employment and self-development must be created for the local residents of the district.

The preparation of handbooks for maintenance and repairs will be of great benefit in this process, and planning and approval procedures for restoration work need to be drafted along with the creation of support services.

Some key issues include the goals of ensuring the protection of the traditional plan and spatial character of the inns, the sustainability of the original architectural structure and its details, and the transformation of those spaces into environments of healthy living. Also, additions to memorial edifices that are not worthy of protecting should be removed and functions that do not suit the building's historical character should be identified and eliminated.

While protecting the courtyard system of the inns, it will be optimal to faithfully reconstruct those sections that existed in the original architectural structure but are missing today and protect the original character and paving of the streets, which should re-designated primarily for pedestrian use.

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